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HENRI QUATRE;

OR,

THE DAYS OF THE LEAGUE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

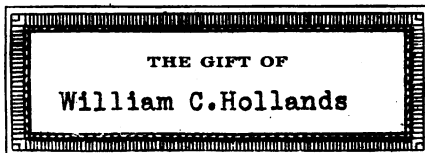
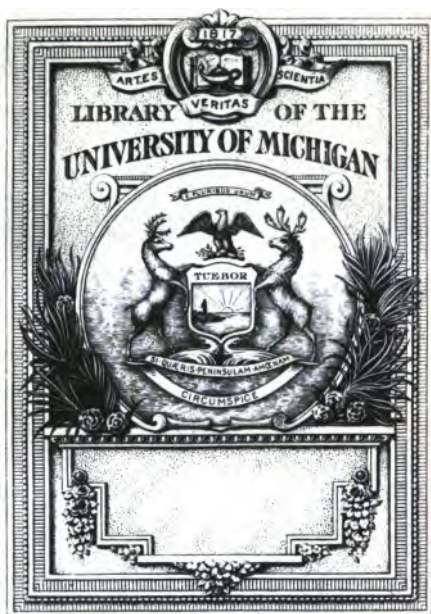


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HENRI QUATRE;

OR,

THE DAYS OF THE LEAGUE.

CHAPTER I.

Farewell to thy fountains, farewell to thy shades,
To the song of thy youth, and the dance of thy maids,
To the breath of thy gardens, the hum of thy bees,
And the long waving line of the blue Pyrenees.

Huguenot Song.

OUR story opens in the old palace of the Louvre, during the away of Catherine de Medicis, whose feeble son, Henry of Valois, was content to pass away his hours in alternate fits of superstitious devotion and debauchery; while his politic mother grasped the reins of government with a steady, unflinching hand. But though the splendour in which Catherine delighted to enshrine her court, and the fastidious and pious observances of her son and his favourites, were an inexhaustible theme of conversation and amusement to the gay Parisians; yet to the stranger, and the native of the west and south-west provinces of France, the Louvre contained an object of more intense interest.

It had been for many years the prison abode of Henry de Bourbon, King of Navarre, and consort of Margaret, the daughter of the subtle De Medicis, who held him in thralldom.

His Father, Anthony, Duke de Vendôme, chief of the Bourbon line of princes, by a marriage with the heiress of the

house of D'Albret, became possessed of the title of King of Navarre, in addition to his own ancestral station of Prince of the blood of France. In the event of the dynasty of Valois failing in male issue, the crown of France, according to the ancient salique law, descended to the Bourbons: a contingency which made them of great importance in the eyes both of their sovereign and his subjects.

Anthony had become, either through policy or religious conviction, a Calvinist; a sect the members of which were, in France and the adjoining kingdom of Navarre, designated Huguenots, an appellation of uncertain etymology. The followers of the Genevese reformer composed, at the period of the marriage of the Duke de Vendôme, nearly the entire population of the Navarrese territories, and a great portion of the inhabitants of the western provinces of France.

As Jeanne D'Albret, the young Queen of Navarre, had been educated in the doctrines of the reformed Church, her friends hailed with pleasure the suit of De Vendôme; from a union with a prince who ranked as leader of the Huguenots of France, they wisely augured an accession of strength to the new faith; but the advantage was not wholly on the side of the Navarrese. Since the rebellion of the Constable de Bourbon, his family had remained comparatively poor: and when, in addition to the weakness attendant on poverty, was added the crime of heresy, which brought down on the head of the offender the persecution of the Catholic Church, and the displeasure of the French court, it may be supposed that the acquisition of an independent sovereignty was a lucky turn of fortune. The fruit of this union was the monarch who now loitered his days idly, a captive of the cruel jailer Catherine. The concentration of strength which the marriage brought to the Huguenots of France, and the members of the same sect in the adjoining territory of Navarre, had rendered them doubly obnoxious to the court of the Louvre, and their destruction was resolved on.

After the death of Anthony, and at the period when the young prince his son had just arrived at manhood, proposals for the renewal of peace between the Huguenots and Catholics were forwarded from Paris to the queen and the Council of Navarre; and it was stipulated, in order that the concord might be more binding, that the youthful king should marry Margaret, sister of the reigning monarch, Charles IX.

To many of the Huguenot chiefs, these offers appeared too tempting to be sincere; but opinions were divided; other

nobles of equal rank and station argued, that the French court had become heartily sick of the hostilities which almost yearly ensued between its armies and the forces of the reformed faith; and that the proud monarch of the Louvre was willing to gain repose even at the price which he openly offered.

Inclining to the latter opinion was Coligni, Admiral of France, who, like most of his predecessors in the same high office, was more conversant with the marshalling of troops on terra firma than with the imperfect naval tactics of the age. He was a staunch Huguenot, an able politician, an intrepid warrior, and a skilful, though often unfortunate, general. But from every defeat he arose with increased strength; till at length, during the minority of the King of Navarre, and while recognised chief of the Huguenots, he was enabled to threaten even Paris itself.

It was probably a full consciousness of his own strength that influenced him in believing to be sincere the desire of peace evinced by the Louvre. He persuaded the Queen of Navarre to accept the proffered proposals; and also to accompany her son to Paris, whither he himself repaired, attended by nearly all the Huguenot noblesse, who were naturally anxious to share in festivities to which internal commotions had rendered them so long strangers.

The espousals took place according to treaty; and the prince led his bride to the palace of her mother, ignorant that his bridal home was to be his future prison. Yet so it proved, after one short week of festivity. The queen, Jeanne, died within that period; and it was supposed, through the agency of poison; while from his chamber in the Louvre her youthful son heard the streets resound with the death-cries of his unfortunate subjects and friends; and he himself was menaced with instant death by his brother-in-law Charles (the co-agent with Catherine in the massacre), if he did not consent to accept the olden faith; a proposal to which he gave a forced assent.

Thus, by a bold and cruel stratagem, was the flower of the Huguenots cut off; the admiral and his friends slaughtered, and the young prince not only deprived of his liberty, but made to undergo the ceremony of conversion to a religion which he had been taught to despise. From that period he was detained a captive in the palace; and as his consort Margaret had been forced into the marriage, and had often expressed aversion to her husband, he was willingly allowed the equivocal pleasure of her society. This refinement of cruelty, however, did not answer

the intentions of his persecutors. As the dislike of his haughty queen did not spring from personal hatred of her spouse, but simply from an abhorrence of a marriage which had been thrust upon her, and at a time when her heart was averse to aught but sorrow, she gradually ceased evincing anger ; thus arose between them a silent, but thoroughly understood compact, based on a mutual freedom of action, and a cessation of each other's society, save on occasions necessary to the etiquette of the court.

Charles did not live more than two years after the massacre of St. Bartholomew, and was succeeded by his brother Henry, who had, while enjoying the dukedom of Anjou, been elected to the throne of Poland, which he, however, now abandoned for his own birthright in France.

To the captive monarch, the accession of Henry was of the greatest moment. This prince was happily deficient in the sanguinary violence of his brother Charles, and he allowed the prisoner the range of the palace and gardens, with permission to join the royal hunting-parties ; which, however, on such occasions, were attended by a numerous guard, stationed at intervals so as entirely to preclude the chance of escape.

But though these indulgences softened the rigour of confinement, and gilded, as it were, the iron bars of his prison, yet the prospect of freedom was as distant as ever from his view. Catherine still lived ; still governed ; and the uneven course of her son's reign ;—a career of greater perplexity than even the blood-stained track of the deceased Charles—required that she should keep closely guarded the royal prisoner, whom she wisely deemed, while safe within her power, a chained element of discord and civil strife.

When Henry returned from Poland, he found his subjects divided into two religious sects ; and on the side of the more bigoted of the Catholic population, a violent outcry to follow up the unforgettén massacre by an entire extermination of the Huguenots. But the monarch, who had lived out of the reach of religious animosities, and was also of a mild disposition, with a mind quite unpractised in the temporizing policy necessary to adjust the claims of rival factions without quarrelling with either, at once offended the most powerful and the most violent of his subjects, by publicly declaring that he cared for the disputes of neither party, but would govern justly, and redress all grievances. The priests took the alarm, and affirmed that the king was himself a Huguenot ; but this term was too moderate for their increasing wrath, and they suc-

cessively denounced him a heretic, an atheist, and a sorcerer.

From the period of this unfortunate declaration, the ancient throne of Valois tottered. Materials were everywhere ripe for a combination to overthrow his sovereignty; the priesthood were his bitter enemies; and a great portion of the noblesse subscribed to a similar feeling, but from different causes; a small portion through a conscientious desire of supporting the Catholic Church; while the greater number, from motives the reverse of pious, were secretly preparing schemes of territorial aggrandizement, to be put in execution when the power of the crown should be reft away by their ecclesiastical colleagues.

Henry of Lorraine, Duke of Guise, an offshoot by three descents from the royal house of Lorraine, was the ambitious son of an ambitious father, joining the talents and courage of his parent to manners more affable and popular. He saw that the hour of advancement, for which his father Francis and his grandsire Claude had toiled and spilt their blood, was at hand, and he resolved that it should not slip by unheeded.

A portion of the noblesse and the body of the priesthood were, as we have already narrated, plotting the destruction of their monarch; but their leader, Guise, looking with an observant eye on the large population and wealth of Paris and the chief cities of France, beheld an incipient and nascent power, which, by proper management, might be rendered more formidable to the king, than were the nobles or even the priesthood.

He opened these views to his clerical friends; and as they immediately perceived the advantages of the proposed alliance, a compact was made, in which it was stipulated that they should be the agents in causing the new force to act against the throne. Joyfully they wrought on the minds of the burgesses and inferior classes, nor did they cease till they had instilled into their several flocks, all their own malicious venom against Valois. They made the people believe that the Catholic religion was about to be overthrown by an atheist king; and that the only means of preserving the faith and worship of their fathers, was by dethroning the offending sovereign.

The plot succeeded to the satisfaction of the duke; the Catholic portion of the community was in a ferment; and Guise now stepped forward and announced himself to the people—in the hour of their need—as the protector of the holy

Catholic religion. This step carried him at once to the summit of popular power ; and from the eminence he saw, with a clear eye, a path to the throne.

Catherine deeply deplored her son's error in betraying his mind to the priesthood ; she perceived that his power was shaken to its foundation, and she looked around for the elements of support.

The Huguenots were as full of wrath against the court as were the Catholics ; the provinces, in which they mustered strongly, laughed to scorn the financial agents of the government ; and the nobles threatened a fresh rebellion on account of the continued captivity of their chief.

Thus was she assailed on both sides, and it seemed to every one but herself that the throne, which had hitherto stood firm as a rock through centuries of triumph, would ere long fall asunder and crumble into dust. But Catherine possessed a mind of the highest genius, stored with all the accomplishments which genius can master. She stood unmoved at the sight of the yawning chasm. " Out of the nettle Danger is plucked the flower Safety !"—and in the spirit of this axiom, she resolved that the contending elements of destruction should war to her own peace.

To balance the strength and capabilities of her enemies was the mainspring of her policy. If Guise and his faction should move openly in their rebellious career, she determined secretly to stir up her old enemies the Huguenots, and induce them, by promises of support, to take the field, whereby her Catholic subjects would be forced to lay aside their plottings, and hasten to defend themselves. If, in this case, the Huguenots were vanquished, and their enemies returned still more insolent to renew their former attempt on the throne, she had but to open the cage and let out the imprisoned monarch—and every one of his party and religion would rally with joy around the prince, and commence anew the war. If, on the contrary, the Catholics should be beaten, and the Reformed army push their advantage to the danger of the court, she could still purchase her son's safety by the liberation of Navarre on peaceful conditions.

Thus the thread of her policy, though intricate in its windings, was yet whole and sound in its texture. However, she did not look for such extremities, but expected, by a careful adjustment of the elements of strife, to make both parties afraid of each other, and both to stand equally in awe of herself.

Such was the condition of France, such the feelings of its rulers, when our history commences. Navarre had been bent on escape from the first day of his imprisonment, but it was hardly possible, under such a jailer as Catherine, who, in addition to her guards and spies, employed the subtle net of luxury, wherewith she endeavoured to ensnare the prince into a life of inglorious ease and sloth, and thus stifle in his breast every feeling and incitement to action.

If our readers have ever pictured to themselves imprisonment in a sumptuous palace—the attendance of numerous servants—all the luxuries and gayeties of a refined court—the continual presence of ladies with their court-smiles and their boudoir-favours,—and permission from one's wife to be gladdened by them—if they have been delighted with such a picture, they may readily imagine that Navarre, who enjoyed the reality, was a happy man—a king without the cares, and with all the pleasures of royalty.

But though he drank deeply of the Circean cup, deep enough to inthral his soul in bondage, yet he was far from happy. He remembered the hours of childhood passed amid the valleys of Navarre; he often called to mind the exploits of boyhood—feats of archery and horsemanship—the healthful exercises which make youth in love with freedom, and create in it a zest for honourable toil. But still more exciting than these pleasurable reminiscences was the constantly recurring picture of war, which it had been his youthful lot to witness; he had, though at the time but a boy of fifteen, charged at the side of Coligni, in one of the many engagements which had occurred between the rival sects. He felt that he was a soldier; but the aspirations of his genius for military renown were baffled, and died away in unsatisfied desires during his long imprisonment. There were seasons, too, when he believed himself born to achieve the religious freedom of the Huguenots; and he pined amid the splendour of the Louvre, an enthusiast cut off from the purpose of his mission.

Despite these lofty moods of the monarch, Catherine had not missed her aim; luxury had taken a strong hold of the royal prisoner; while his *bonhomie*, affability, and good humour together tended to make him a favourite with the stately, yet condescending dames of the queen-mother's court; in truth, one might at times have taken the prince for a careless, happy courtier.

But the aspect of Navarre during his gayer hours, though it pleased, could not deceive the wily queen; she never re-

linquished one iota of her precaution; and though she permitted him, seemingly, to act with perfect freedom—and he might in consequence be daily seen walking from the crowded saloon to his private study without the intrusion of a guard—from the Louvre to the adjoining gardens of the Tuileries without question or molestation—yet, in truth, he seldom passed from one corridor to another without being watched; and in order that his mind might not busy itself with a useless labour, it was whispered to him by his majesty's command, that her orders to the guard were to take him alive, if possible, in any attempt to escape; and, from experience, he knew that the archers of the guard and the Swiss troops could point an arquebuss with more certainty than warranted him in running the risk of such a venture.

Before the era of the first Francis, of chivalric and licentious memory, the Louvre was a gloomy fortress: in the centre stood a lofty keep or tower, which had been the prison of many of the proud and rebellious vassals of the sovereigns of the house of Valois; but Francis, in accordance with the change of manners which had succeeded the old feudal times of violence and rapine, levelled the whole pile, both prison and royal residence, to the ground, and built on its site a palace worthy of a sovereign who lived without dread of hostilities on the part of his subjects. Successive monarchs added largely to the original structure; and that which, in the days of its founder, was accounted a rare specimen of design, being indeed only the second instance of departure from the gothic to the classic style of architecture in France, is now designated the *Old Louvre*, and its royal purpose superseded by the approximating palace of the Tuileries.

As our readers may be aware, the Louvre is situated on the banks of the Seine, with the *Quai de Bourbon*, a noble promenade, between the palace and the river.

The suite of rooms assigned to Navarre were in the pleasantest ward of the royal residence, being on the side facing the Seine, with windows overlooking, on the left hand, L'Isle du Palais, with the majestic towers of Notre Dame rising above the surrounding mass of houses on the isle; and on the opposite bank of the river, the quays and streets of the Fauxbourg St. Germain, with glimpses of meadows and suburban edifices in the distance.

The captive was alone and standing at the window, engaged in meditating on the fresh chances of escape which had been, at the period when our history commences, unexpectedly

opened to him. Boats were passing up and down the stream ; and when in the intervals of revery, his eyes caught the motion of the rapid craft, and he witnessed the careless freedom of the boatmen, unconscious of a happiness superior to that of the descendant of a long line of princes, a sigh escaped almost involuntarily at the reflection of his own captivity.

In height, Navarre was scarcely above the ordinary standard, but strong-limbed and symmetrical ; his features cast in a kingly mould, and the profile of the face worthy of an ancient Roman. He had passed the period of early manhood, and had arrived at an age which, retaining the strength and spirits of youth, gives birth to ambition and the maturer passions of the human heart.

Catherine had committed the care of the prisoner to Marshal de Biron, governor of the Louvre, who was held responsible for the safe-keeping of his charge. Ere the marshal made his daily report to the queen, it was his custom to visit the captive monarch—an affair of espionage certainly, but which the good-breeding of De Biron contrived should wear the aspect of courtesy and respect. It was a full hour beyond the usual period of his visit—a daily inquisition, which his majesty bore with a good grace, and ever returned the greeting of the governor in the same spirit of generous impulse which had dictated the kindness of the old soldier.

The marshal had received a wound at the battle of Dreux, from the effects of which he remained lame, beyond recovery. Ere this untoward misfortune, he had been noticed as a gallant of graceful carriage ; but now, to his mortification, he dragged along a stiffened leg as a serpent its disabled coil.

The rattlesnake warns its victim of approaching danger ; and of equal benefit to Navarre was the well-known step of the governor, as it afforded him the opportunity of removing out of sight whatever papers and secret documents—for his majesty had been full of business of late—might have been dangerously exposed.

But on the morning of which we speak, he had listened in vain for the approach of the marshal ; and impatient of delay, for he ardently wished the visit performed, and his visiter dismissed, he sprang to the window, and sought relief in observing the motion of the river, and the busy scene on its surface, which contrasted too pointedly with his own supine course of life, and induced reflections of a melancholy cast.

“ And yet I feel grateful,” exclaimed he, scarcely conscious

of speaking aloud, "for hope still flatters me with the prospect of liberty."

"Then I perceive you have not forgotten our conversation!" cried a voice from behind; and the startled monarch turned round to face the intruder.

He beheld looking intently at him a young man, short of stature, and of a frame indicative of more strength than elegance; features expressive of humour and good-nature, though rough in their kind; and his whole appearance betokening a man of rank, but with an air of recklessness which, in speaking, was increased by a rapid delivery, and the omission of the customary emphasis on his sentences, to such a degree, that they fell from him without pause, like a running stream of water.

"Monsieur," cried Navarre, "walks as stealthily as a cat!"

"Ay! and with the cunning purpose of the cat," replied the other. "In this Louvre of ours it is held as treason to speak with your majesty anywhere but in a crowded saloon, a tennis-court, or at dinner. If I had leisure, which the claims of the tennis-court never allow me, I would construct a table for the benefit of the court, showing when and where it is safe to approach you, and when dangerous. For the use of the ladies, it might be altered a little. What were accounted suspicious in us, would be scarcely doubtful in them!"

"I am happy to hear," replied Navarre, laughing, "that the ladies incur but little danger in thoughtlessly addressing such a dangerous man as myself; but you, my dear prince, would suffer much from your royal mother's suspicions if she were aware you were here. I would rather hold our conferences in secret, and at night, like our last, for the old marshal, as you know, comes every morning to reconnoitre, and he is as quick-eyed as a lynx. I expect him every moment!"

"*Diable!* Then I have thrown my ball as wide of the mark as a Biscayan," exclaimed the Duke d'Alençon, the youngest son of Catherine, for such was the rank of the speaker; "I am sure that the marshal is now in the cabinet with my mother, and I fancied that his morning's visit to yourself was a by-gone event. Should he come here, he must not see me—but let me ask, while there is yet time, if a night's sleep have conjured up objections to the plan proposed in Turenne's letter?"

Ere we narrate the answer of Navarre, we must entreat our reader's patience, while we endeavour, in a few words, to

develop the scheme which was agitating both heart and soul of the wayward d'Alençon.

The duke was the youngest son of the queen-mother of France, and in some qualities the worst of the family. His kindred were learned, and had acquired all the accomplishments of the age, while he remained ignorant, and never studied any matter beyond the details of the tennis-court; the other princes of the house of Valois were noted for their love of the fine arts, their taste and skill in poetry—a faculty not denied even to the sanguinary Charles—a due sense of the importance of a gallant and manly bearing in the eyes of the people, and a feeling for the imposing display of architecture with which a monarch awes and dazzles the eyes of his subjects, and which bore fruits in the many noble edifices which these princes bequeathed to posterity—and above all, for a marked and flattering attention to the grace and charm of beauty displayed in the court, which Anne of Bretagne, wife of the twelfth Louis, had increased, till the Louvre had become a school of elegance inferior only to the Italian courts. But to none of these objects did François Duke d'Alençon turn a favourable eye. And with respect to the sentiment for which he could be least of all excused—he made it a rule—if indeed, up to the period when our story commences, he had ever made a rule—to offend the most conspicuous beauties of the court; though it must be admitted in his favour, and it was a negative virtue not possessed by many whose gallantry was unquestionable, that he was never known to calumniate any of them.

For the rival doctrines of the Catholics and the Huguenots he cared not, and his indifference affixed upon him the stigma of heresy. But no one took the trouble of speculating on the degree of his political importance; he lived on from year to year, saying uncivil things to the ladies, and playing from morn till night at tennis. When Charles died, his brother Henry, the next in age, was seated on the throne of Poland; and many of the courtiers supposing he would continue in that kingdom, proffered homage to D'Alençon; but Henry, however, soon returned, and the tennis-player was abandoned to his former obscurity, and laughed at by the witty dames of the court, out of revenge for the constant warfare he maintained against them. This was taking him at a sore disadvantage; he felt piqued for the first time in his life, and complained to the queen-mother.

To appease him, as well as also to fulfil a prophecy which had been foretold to her family, she presented the prince with

an autograph letter, a large sum of money, and the Huguenot book of ritual, saying, when she dismissed him—"If you make a proper use of these gifts, you may yet be a king. Away to the unmarried Queen of England ! Give her this letter to read ; distribute the money among her ministers ; and learn this book by heart, that you may be able to talk heresy to her majesty's content ! I have great misgivings of conscience in making you a heretic, but my children have proved so zealous in the good and true faith, that I can afford a little lapse in my youngest son. When you are king, my dear François, we will set the island in order !"

A few months passed by, and brought back the duke to Paris without money, without wife, and without temper. On the night of his arrival, he sent secretly to several of his friends, desiring them to assemble in the tennis-court of the Louvre early the next morning. They met and began to play as heretofore with the prince : but that day was a never-to-be-forgotten day in the lighter annals of the Louvre. D'Alençon had informed none, save his comrades, of his return ; so that all were amazed when word flew from mouth to mouth that the duke was playing at tennis in the court below, instead of, as was supposed, making love at Havering-atte-Bowre or Greenwich.

All the world, as our neighbours vainly say, came to witness the miracle ; and as opportunity occurred, the prince was interrogated relative to his sojourn in England ; and the hasty answers he returned caused roars of laughter, as piecemeal by piecemeal, in the intervals of the game, the narrative of his foreign residence and treatment flowed from him in his replies to the malicious questioners.

Imagine the duke earnestly engaged at play, but ever and anon interrupted by an equerry, or a fair *dame d'honneur*, or his mother, calling out to her son by his Christian name, François ; his anger at the interruption, and his reply !

Sometimes it was an explosion of anger against Queen Elizabeth ; next his rage would fall upon her ministers, and he uttered invectives against Cecil, or the others who drained his purse. But it was a peculiarity in the conversation of the prince, that the most trivial things were spoken of with as much importance as the most essential ; even as in the rapid flow of his discourse, words of power and those of connexion merely, came forth alike undistinguished. The train of his ideas was alternate gem and dross ; now a sarcasm, that, could Elizabeth have heard it, would have roused her revenge ; and

now a trifling charge against some islander for his deficiency of skill in tennis; anon an anecdote condensed into as few words as possible, and uttered with an air of haste which added to its charm; next, a regret for his deficiency of Huguenot doctrine, and the unpleasant consequences which resulted from it; or, when the querist was a lady and very beautiful, a hint that the beauty of the French dames was altogether surpassed by the charms of the English ladies.

Such was the nature of this celebrated *jour de plaisance*; and to those fair beings, who never ventured to join the hunting parties at Fontainebleau, it afforded some faint idea of a boar or stag at bay.

But after that day, he would never mention in public his journey to England, and rudely silenced every inquiry on the subject; yet his fair antagonists would not suffer the event to be forgotten: they had now a formidable weapon in their hands, and in every encounter he was sure to hear something of the Queen of England.

Had his friends, however, forgotten the ridicule of the *plaisance*, and reflected on the shrewdness of his replies, his sarcasms on the English, and even on the political acumen of his remarks, they would have formed a juster estimate of his character. No one even dreamed that he had an observant eye which suffered nothing to escape; a penetration which showed him what was passing in the minds of others; and a memory in which were hoarded as in a storehouse the follies, the foibles, and the intrigues of his contemporaries. But these were faculties unnoticed of the court; and D'Alençon gradually sunk to his former level, and ceased to elicit more than trifling attention. Far different was it with himself.

His chief defect was a want of enthusiasm: could masters have been found with authority to reward and punish their pupil, he might have been a learned man; had empire, renown, or political influence walked to his idle ambition, he would have grasped the treasure, and been gratified with its possession; but his active, unsolicited energies did not rise beyond the study of tennis.

In our estimate of character, it were idle for us to say,—speaking, mayhap, of a philosopher or man of science—that his mind is equal to that of another, who has surmounted difficulties or made a discovery, because the former might in his conversation have thrown a gleam of light on the eminence which the latter had reached; energy and enthusiasm are part and parcel of genius; wanting these, the owner of the other re-

quisites to a great mind sinks into eccentricity,—perhaps insanity, if his unsatisfied desires, without power to urge him onward, prey upon themselves.

But the mind of D'Alençon, though under ordinary circumstances void of ambition, was yet capable, when strongly excited, of acting with energy and resolution.

He was not blind to the insidious encroachments of the Duke of Guise ; and it required no extraordinary foresight on his part to perceive, that if the union and intimacy of the former with the citizens and the priesthood were permitted to increase, it would lead to the subversion of his brother's throne, and the expulsion of his family from their high estate ; and if such a misfortune should happen, his own birthright would be lost, and the dynasty of Valois cast away for ever.

To repel the intruder would have been the mainspring of every act and motive of a mind of ordinary energy : but to excite that of monsieur, the king's brother, to the requisite pitch of resolution, it was necessary that he should become the laughing-stock of the whole court.

The persevering raillery of the courtiers, and of his fair adversaries, who did not fail to make a bitter and exulting use of the advantage which the prince's late adventures in England, and his double disappointment of a crown, both at home and across the channel, afforded them, stung him almost to madness.

"They shall see," said D'Alençon to himself, "that I am capable of something, and though haughty and vain England will not listen to my suit, yet will I struggle with Guise for that sceptre which my foolish brother suffers to be snatched from his hands!"

The anger of a man unused to passion is terrible ; and equally transcendent is the energy of a slothful mind. The first steps of the hero of the tennis-court were those of a waking giant. He opened his schemes to the Viscount de Turenne, a man of ready eloquence and uncertain principles, wavering between Catholicism and the Reformed faith. But the offers of monsieur were, however, decisive of the viscount's religion ; the new light of Calvin, which had hitherto burned obscurely, now shot forth a coruscation of splendour which completely extinguished the embers of the olden faith ; and the convert flew into Germany with a large sum of money to raise a body of troops in the Protestant principalities. They were to encamp on the banks of the Rhine ; and it was to be given out that their destination was Ireland, to assist the Queen Eliza-

both in suppressing the rebellion there, mercenary aid of a similar character having been too long the fashion among the European sovereigns to render the tale at all improbable; and the readiness of the German princes to lend themselves and their subjects to foreign powers had become proverbial.

At the same time that D'Alençon and his quickwitted coadjutor had resolved on this movement, the prince turned his attention to a quarter nearer home. He was convinced that if Navarre were liberated from thralldom, a large army of Huguenots might speedily be assembled in Gascony or the adjoining provinces, the more especially as they had already evinced symptoms of rebellion.

"Yes! the plan is perfect!" soliloquized monsieur; "while my Germans are rushing into France from the Rhenish provinces, Navarre's Huguenots must hasten to join them from the south."

It was no easy matter to hold unsuspected communication with the Bourbon captive, but the ingenuity of D'Alençon overcame this difficulty; the proposed campaign was opened in secret to Navarre, who, as may be expected, caught at it eagerly, and the two princes were soon absorbed in the details of the plot; the discussion of which, after an interview on the preceding night, had brought the prince to the chamber of his friend. But to return to the dialogue.

"The viscount writes as favourably as we could wish," said Navarre, in a low tone, as they stood together at the window; "but let me understand you, that there may be no after scruples! I and your brother are enemies, and there is no moral obligation violated by my warring against him even to his overthrow—but for yourself, his kinsman, to join arms with me against his authority and the safety even of your royal parent! Are you prepared for the obloquy of the attempt?"

"I have already told you, what you know full well," replied D'Alençon, "that my brother cannot maintain his station—it is, therefore, a question only between the Duke of Guise and myself, who shall have the empty throne. My brother is on a precipice, and nothing can save him from being tumbled over—I stand midway between the elevation and the depth of his fall—to attempt arresting his descent would only be falling with him—but as he drops by me, I shall snatch at the crown.—But I speak to a closed ear,—you listen not to what I say!"

And such indeed was the truth. During the colloquy, the sun, which had been obscured by floating clouds, now shone out cheerfully, and illumined the distant hills, which were partially

seen in the country beyond the Fauxbourg. The change brought sorrow to the heart of Navarre, who forgot the presence of his eccentric ally, and stood gazing on the scene heedless of D'Alençon's metaphors.

"Alas ! it is too true !" replied Navarre, resuming his attention : "I was thinking what happiness it would be to stand on yon green summit in the free light of the sun, and look for the last time upon this vile prison !"

"The palace is good enough," said D'Alençon, "and with the trifling improvements I intend making in it, will be admirable. So are its tenants, very amusing personages, as you yourself often prove. The tennis-court I could make the wonder of Europe. But I have not slept all last night for thinking how we must raise money to pay the Germans when I go to the Rhine. Turenne has spent all in the equipments, and I know they will not stir unless I pay in advance ! What is to be done ?"

"Stake heavily on tennis with the provincial nobles !" answered Navarre.

"No one would bet against my game," replied the prince ; "every one is afraid of me."

The exchequer of monsieur's government at Tours had been exhausted by the supplies afforded to the viscount on his departure for Germany ; and the profound caution necessary to preserve secret the plot, rendered the financial question very difficult of solution.

"My good mother has money in her coffers," said D'Alençon, laughing, "if by any stratagem I could gain some—"

"For the purpose of dethroning her and your brother !—is it not so ?" said Navarre, interrupting him. "She would die at being outwitted !"

"By no means," replied the prince ; "madame would joy in having a son cleverer than herself. But your majesty is ever dwelling on the idea of her anger against me. No doubt you have a rare specimen of our family temper in my sister !"

But Henry of Navarre had been brought up by an affectionate mother, whose memory he worshipped, and his conscience almost smote him for aiding the prince in a rebellion against his parent ; yet Catherine had behaved so cruelly to the Bourbon monarch, that he felt justified in making use of any means to recover his liberty. To the sarcasm of D'Alençon, however, he made no reply.

"If Margaret trouble you," continued the prince, seeing that Navarre was silent, "I would have your majesty send her to

govern your territory during your absence. She would confer an inestimable benefit on the country, by civilizing your half-barbarous barons—but—hark! That is the footstep of De Biron in the corridor—let me conceal myself in the next chamber; he will not venture so far without your permission.”

CHAPTER II.

——— My reward is power;
An outward trifle, bought with inward peace.

D'AVENANT.

THE marshal's delay in visiting his royal prisoner arose from an unexpected command of Catherine, requiring his presence in her cabinet. This was a small, but lofty room; the walls were hung with silk tapestry, and the floor covered with the richest carpet the Grand Seignior could present his old ally. In front of the tapestry were several mirrors, especial favourites with the visitors of both sexes while waiting to address the royal ear. In the centre of the cabinet stood a table of exquisite workmanship, and by its side, in a stately chair, sat the queen-mother of France: the page whom she had summoned from the ante-room had just departed to seek the marshal; and there remained only two ladies of the court in attendance on its imperial mistress.

Strangers who had known her only by the universal report of her cruelties and her subtlety, her age and the number and reputation of her children, were ever agreeably disappointed on their introduction. He who had pictured to himself a woman older in care than years, wrinkled and ill-tempered; or if, perchance, possessing a hearsay knowledge of her charms, expected a Medea,—the vestiges of beauty struggling with the corroding lines of passion—was dumb-struck on finding himself in the presence of a matron with a fine Italian face; features most symmetrical, clear, and unwrinkled; a complexion unmatched, save by the fair Margaret her daughter; and an eye which critics of female loveliness might object to as more appropriate to a Cæsar or an Alexander, yet capable, at seasons, of expressing the softer passions. The ordinary expression of the face was grave, sedate, and majestic; but its gravity was of the true southern quality, willing to give way

to mirth ; and its majesty of nature, commanding homage from all.

Had not her powers of penetration been equalled by her humour, that subtle yet active faculty, which holds its possessor in love with the world, and presents in its magic mirror the bright side of danger or evil to the threatened victim—her charms would, indeed, have long since sunk beneath the harassing nature of her duties.

Her son required incessant looking after, lest he should commit an irreparable mischief. Since his calamitous error with the priesthood, she had grasped more earnestly than ever the reins of government, and had determined to bring into play the whole scope of her policy, and stand or fall by the issue. Valois was now at Vincennes with his favourites, but there or elsewhere, his absence was of no moment, so that he meddled not with affairs of state.

François, Duke D'Alençon, was a wayward imp, that might one day brood disaster ; but at present she thought his soul safely locked up within the precincts of the tennis-court. Navarre required watching vigilantly ; and yet to be treated with courtesy withal, lest the chances of fortune might one day force her to appeal to him for aid.

His Huguenot friends threatened another rebellion ; and the Catholics threatened the Huguenots with extermination ; the more powerful of the noblesse were promising themselves aggrandizement in the expected struggle : the nations of Europe were looking on with interested eyes ;—those of the Reformed faith, such as the English, the Hollanders, and the Germans, preparing to succour their brethren in religion—and the States which retained the doctrines of Rome, as Spain, besides the papal power itself, and the emperor, equally ready to afford aid to the Catholic malcontents : these objects, as well as many others of minor importance, pressed closely on her attention, and yet, absorbing as they were, she felt that the whole of her energies were essential to counterbalance the insidious attempts on the crown by the Duke of Guise.

Here was a chaos of hostile and conflicting powers to disturb the serenity of a sovereign—and that sovereign a woman ! The long array of her enemies passed slowly before her imagination in review ; and she saw that while she kept aloof from their friendship, all were hostile. But in this conflictive hostility and diversity of interests lay her security. She could, indeed, make friends of one host by joining in its attempt to destroy the other ; but that object accomplished, she

knew that her good friends would have both leisure and inclination to compass her own destruction. The only true policy was to play one against the other, and to encourage and nourish into maturity a third party, the friends of the court; and she despaired not of the hope, that these last might at some period prove strong enough to vanquish the conqueror, whether Catholic or Huguenot.

Although surrounded by such manifold dangers, she quailed not; she relied on the sincerity of her faith, and its reward—on her own transcendent genius, which had guided safely the vessel of the state during the reign of three minors. “As it has been, so it shall be!” exclaimed the adventurous queen. She felt proud of the contest; proud of her station and of herself—her mind and her personal charms; and as she turned half round and glanced at the mirror—though her brow was as haughty as the front of Minerva in the ranks of war, there was a smile upon her mouth which spoke of triumph and Italian cunning.

She sat for a while in thought, undisturbed by the conversation which was carried on in a low tone by the two ladies, who were at the window behind her chair. Suddenly an idea entered her mind that the King of Navarre had been more friendly and communicative with her son François than was his wonted custom; and she questioned the taller of the ladies, by the name of D’Usez, on the subject.

The Duchess D’Usez was the chief lady of the household, and a woman who joined great penetration and a talent for political intrigue, with personal charms of a high order. She was dark even to swarthiness; and her eyes, which gave promise of as much wit as passion, though not large, were very brilliant;—a thousand little star-rays shot from their surface in the kindling animation of her discourse. Her figure was tall, slender, and commanding; in the remotest province she would have been recognised as a denizen of the court.

By the reply of the duchess, the queen discovered that she had also remarked a mutual alteration in the behaviour of François and the King of Navarre. D’Usez declared that she thought monsieur must be in love; and that the passion and its treatment being new to him, he had made a confidant of the experienced Navarre.

Her majesty laughed, and called upon the other lady, the Princess de Condé, for her opinion.

This princess had been a co-heiress of the house of Cleves of Nevers; and, by marriage (since dissolved by the death of

her husband, a Bourbon prince), allied to royalty. She resided at the Louvre, and was the confidant and directress of the queen in all matters of pleasure and amusement.

Catherine had proved herself omnipotent with most foreign powers, through the spells which she cast around their ambassadors. When an object was to be gained with any of these, her court became of a sudden the realization of fairy land, and the *beau idéal* of all that was graceful, voluptuous, and romantic. The aquatic fêtes rivalled those of Venice, and the *coup-d'œil* of her saloons was the loveliest vista on earth; and well they might be, for she had resident in the Louvre full three hundred ladies of the best families in France: in surrounding herself with this train of beauty she followed the example of her predecessor Anne, but turned it to better account.

It was not, however, the splendour of gold and pearl, and even of female charms, but the ingenious invention and elegance visible in her fêtes and ballets, which rendered them so bewitching; and these qualities were owing to the superintendence of the Princess de Condé. In England she would have been called mistress of the revels: but Condé, though of such illustrious connexion, was a lady of genius, and believed that the sway over the graces of life was not beneath her rank. She danced so divinely, that the Polish nobles came from Warsaw to witness her grace in the "poetry of motion." Nor were such exhibitions a disgrace to her rank in an age which saw Catherine and her family take parts in scenic representations. Condé but endeavoured to realize her own perceptions of grace and elegance, and the means afforded her by the queen were such as never artist, before or since, possessed. Her ballets escaped even the criticism of the abrupt D'Alençon. The features of the princess were not very beautiful, and her figure, though light, was excelled by many of the forms which flitted through the halls of the Louvre; but the grace which accompanied her steps was unsurpassed and inimitable.

To the question of Catherine, she replied that she hoped the prince was in love; but she had not observed any symptoms of the passion. "We shall find out the truth by degrees;" said the queen; "I have requested De Biron to come hither, as I wish to caution him respecting the chances of escape which are afforded the Bourbon prince when he walks alone in the gardens of the Tuileries. I will ask the marshal if he have observed any change in François or his prisoner.

But why, Condé, do you wish my son in the troubles of love?"

"Does not your majesty perceive," exclaimed D'Usez, taking up the discourse, "that the princess would compose a ballet on the subject? What an opportunity to exhibit the wild, abrupt, fantastic gait of monsieur! And she might find several of her friends capable of the representation. I can even suggest to madame an incident. There is a gentleman here from Venice, who amuses us with keeping in the air a number of tennis-balls without suffering one to fall to the ground. Now if he engaged to take the rôle of the prince, he might be instructed to dance around his mistress, enveloping her in a perpetual shower of the objects of his delight!"

"Why, D'Usez!" exclaimed her Majesty, smiling, "you will soon wish to change departments with the Princess!"

This remark applied to the commonly received, and indeed, correct characters of the two *confidantes* of her majesty, D'Usez advising the queen on matters of business and policy only, while the princess restricted her power to a dominion over the revels; and as they never interfered with each other's domain, they continued more friendly than favourites could possibly expect to be.

While Catherine was engaged in discussing the behaviour of her son, the Countess de Candales craved admittance, which was granted. When the worthy chronicler, who has recorded these events, described the lady as an heiress with an English title, we repeated the word Candales several times without bringing to mind such a place in merry England; but knowing that our witty neighbours make sad havoc with the orthography of foreign history and geography, we looked closely at the probable pronunciation of the dissyllable, and uttered "Kendal." When searching into English and French authorities for the origin of the title, we found that her ancestor St. Foix had married an English lady; and our monarch had conferred on, or confirmed to him, we now forget which, the rank and domains of the earldom of Kendal: the remains of the castle we have seen crowning the steep canonical hill near the famed Westmoreland town. We, however, deem it a disgrace to the French heralds, and even to the family, that they should have been unable to spell their own lordship correctly.

The countess, who was betrothed to a noble whom we shall soon have occasion to introduce to our readers, was about five-and-twenty summers old; or if beyond that number, by her

appearance, the winters must have passed very lightly over her head. She was vain, superficial, somewhat of a coquette, and assumed an air of childish simplicity, thinking, as her compeeresses imagined, that it added to her charms, which were, indeed, captivating enough—to say nothing of her coronet and lands. She was besides very curious in her friends' affairs ; whether this was assumed with her childish air, or whether it was her natural disposition, we cannot say. *Madame la Comtesse*, however, received her share of D'Alençon's rough remarks ; and if his censorship were ever deserved, she merited the chastisement.

The countess came ostensibly to ask some trifling favour of the queen ; she did not, however, retire, upon her suit being granted, but continued in the cabinet, talking with Condé, while Catherine was deeply engaged conversing with the duchess.

A loud laugh from the princess caused the queen to look round ; seeing her still laughing immoderately, and, as it was very unusual for her to indulge in such open mirth, she inquired the cause. The mistress of the revels did not reply verbally, but made a low courtesy to the queen, and another to the countess.

"Candales," exclaimed Catherine, whose curiosity was raised, "you have broken the thread of our quiet mirth : and D'Usez and ourself must now join in yours."

The lady did not reply, but stood simpering ; her majesty was, however, too impatient to bear with the display.

"Cease ! Candales !" reiterated the queen, "that air is very simple and beautiful—but the duke cannot see you—and your own chamber is best for practising. Come ! one glance at yourself in the mirror—and then relieve our curiosity."

D'Usez smiled scornfully upon the countess ; but madame, the politic duchess, forgot that her own finesse was as artificial as the behaviour of her friend. Ladies, however, are seldom charitable to each other's systems. Condé stood behind the simperer, enjoying in anticipation the important discovery about to be made.

"It is a trifle of which I cannot speak—I ought not," said Candales.

"Then why tell the princess ?" cried Catherine.

"It is only yourself I dare not tell," replied the countess : "for it concerns one of your majesty's family !"

These words roused more than curiosity in the queen : she rushed across the room, and grasping the arm of the pretendedly reluctant lady, exclaimed—"You little affected creature, what mischief are you harbouring !"

The countess was now really too frightened to speak; but Condé good-humouredly said—"What Margaret has learned is by accident; but she, no doubt, fears your majesty will blame her curiosity."

"I will neither blame you, nor reveal that it was you who made this discovery, whatever it may be," said the eager queen, addressing the countess. "Come! speak like a sensible woman—I beg pardon of madame—I should have said, child!"

And Catherine patted her on the cheek. The ladies laughed, not excepting Candales herself; her only ill-nature lay in a little justifiable malice against the hero of her narration!—Reluctant as she had shown herself in acknowledging to the queen that her adventure was worth listening to, yet the visible delight which she manifested in the narration, sanctioned the belief of her audience that nothing would have been more disagreeable to her, than to have been obliged to preserve silence on so interesting a theme.

It appeared from her tale, that on the previous evening, after the ordinary hour of rest, the countess had accidentally seen her tormentor, D'Alençon, descend the staircase which led from his quarter of the palace, cross the vestibule, and enter the grand hall. Except on occasions of festivity, it was at night as dark as a lonesome church; and as monsieur had no reputation either for the self-infliction of penance, or for solitary meditation, the curiosity of the lady was at the highest pitch to discover his business in the forsaken arena of gayety. Having suffered much from the *brusque* behaviour of the prince, and being in consequence stimulated by revenge, as well as curiosity, she resolved, if possible, to find out his secret.

She returned to her chamber for a dark-coloured mantle, with which she enveloped her glittering dress, and thus disguised, stole softly to the door of the hall, which had been, as she supposed, purposely left ajar.

The countess was unable to distinguish the words of a whispering colloquy, which echoed faintly through the vast space of the hall; but was forced to remain contented with the vague discovery that D'Alençon was not alone in his meditations. Whether her courage, goaded by curiosity, would have been equal to the adventure of a closer approach to the prince and his companion, we cannot determine; but the lady had sufficient sense to know that the flood of light from the vestibule, which would have been flung into the dreary hall on her opening the door, must have startled the inmates and betrayed herself.

Fortunately for the reputation of the fair eaves-dropper, all within the palace was still and quiet, save the occasional clang of arms of the Swiss in their guard-room, and the unintelligible whispering from a distant quarter of the hall, which in vain poured its mystic murmurs on the ear of the quick-breathing, impatient, and disappointed countess.

How long she remained at her disagreeable post she could not be brought to own; but she did not quit it till the hasty tread of feet announced the approach of monsieur and the unknown. This was a catastrophe which she had forgotten to take heed of; they were close upon the door ere her terror allowed her either to hasten away or conceal herself; but thanks to the costly fancy of Pierre Lescot, the architect, two richly sculptured pillars adorned the entrance to the saloon, and behind the one farthest from the staircase the lady secreted herself. Too frightened to venture to look out from her retreat, she heard D'Alençon say to his companion—

“To-morrow night at the same hour,—as I dare not, for your own sake, address you before friends or enemies,—we shall meet again. Time is precious; but every day brings us nearer to a happier state!”

Candales heard them ascend the staircase, and ventured a hasty glance; but it was too late; the vision had all passed away, save a momentary view of the foot and sword-scabbard of the prince. She, however, felt assured that the companion of François was a female, as none of the other sex could step so lightly. “This is just as I predicted,” said the duchess, when Candales had concluded the narrative;—“the strange and altered manner of monsieur is now accounted for. But what an event! What lady can it be, who has been gifted with such miraculous power to enter into a successful competition with a tennis-ball?”

“They meet again to-night!” said the countess, cunningly, though with an air of simplicity. She thought the jokes about the Queen of England were becoming stale; and the new adventure promised to be a happy windfall to their wit.

“Stay!” exclaimed Catherine, “François has given you all cause for a little mirth at his expense, and I cannot shield him. But who may the lady be? Or is it a lady at all? Treason can step as lightly as Terpsichore!”

Catherine was more than dubious of the sex of her son's companion; the event was a corroboration of her previous suspicions; and though the words uttered were applicable to the fairer half of the creation, yet the absence of any name or en-

dearing expression—which even such an eccentric being as D'Alençon would not have omitted in his address—were strikingly indicative of the truth of her own surmise.

Pending the discussion of this point, and also of a proposal from D'Usez to surprise the prince, De Biron was announced.

"Let us ask Vulcan's opinion," cried Candales, in a voice which she intended should not be beyond a whisper.

"Vulcan will be happy to render it," exclaimed De Biron, who overheard the speech, and could not mistake the application of the epithet. He was an elderly man, short and robust in his person, and, as before mentioned, lame; and though he added to these personal disadvantages features harsh and worn by fatigue, yet his air was gentlemanly, and his manners courteous. He was a skilful general, and a very learned and imaginative man, equal to the conduct of the French armies, and as erudite in classic lore as any Frenchman of his day. As a courtier and man of gallantry he was quite at his ease, and his conversation was relished for its originality and wit, though sometimes too pedantic; a fault scarcely avoidable in one whose fancy was rife with the treasures of ancient literature. With the queen-mother he was a favourite, and in her entire confidence; nor did he account himself disagreeable to the ladies of the court.

"I hope you will forgive my rudeness, marshal," said Candales, rather confused, "though I think Vulcan cannot complain, altogether, of the treatment of the inhabitants since he has been forced to live on earth."

"I am never on earth when in the company of the Countess de Candales: and her fair friends bring to memory my former celestial abode," said the polite governor of the Louvre.

By a sign well understood by her ladies, the queen signified her desire of being alone with the marshal. When D'Usez and her companions had retired to the inner chamber, Catherine, after requesting De Biron to seat himself, which she did the more readily on account of his lameness, said in a careless tone—

"Have you seen the King of Navarre this morning, marshal?"

"I was on the way to pay my respects to him when your majesty's summons reached me," replied De Biron.

"He is planning his escape!" said the queen.

The marshal started up as quickly as his lameness would allow of, and looked quite alarmed. Catherine smiled inwardly at his hurried manner; but not wishing to divulge the

adventure of Candales, both on account of the countess, and lest that the lady's opinion might even prove correct, she bade him be again seated, adding—

"I am too quick, monseigneur! I do not mean that I have any specific idea of his plans; but he has, as you know, in his fits of activity, cast a watchful eye around his prison-home. A man in confinement is always trying to escape;—ay, even in his sleep! But, of late, Navarre has enticed my son François into his practices; or wherefore should he court his society?—Do you know any thing of this?"

"I think," replied De Biron, "it is the duke who entices our captive."

"Ah!" exclaimed Catherine, rather piqued at this difference of opinion,—*"François entice the Bourbon! Common sense and yourself sometimes differ, De Biron!"*

"I congratulate myself," said the marshal, with firmness, "that my wandering fancy has been able to do your majesty's family some service."

The queen had no wish to quarrel with her servant; and in a tone which displayed neither anger nor sense of offence, she asked for proofs of his opinion. But the prince had conducted himself so discreetly in his intercourse with Navarre, that it was difficult for the marshal to bring forward any thing tangible; he could only state that such was his impression.

"If I thought," said the queen-mother, "that such was the case, I would place François under your *surveillance* as well as Henry De Bourbon."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed the familiar adviser, hastily; "the office of jailer does not at all suit me. It is bad enough already! I do not know whether I fall under the ridicule of your majesty's friends; but it strikes me, that to see a lame man like myself, who has been used to ride at the head of a large army, hobbling up the staircase every morning to look after a prisoner, as though I were the sub-governor of the Bastile, is at least a fair subject for an epigram."

"And to see that same gentleman," replied the queen, in a calm tone, "entrusted by his sovereign with the safety of the royal person—admitted with the familiarity of an equal into her presence—the most important secrets, personal, and also relating to the state, submitted to his judgment—is, we think, a fair subject for envy!"

This reproof and compliment affected the governor of the Louvre almost to tears; he had scarcely power to exclaim—

"Pardon, most gracious liege, I am a restless, dissatisfied old man!"

"Not so old either," replied Catherine; "at least the tree still bears blossom if we may judge by the gay birds which flutter around it."

"I trust," said the overpowered marshal, "that my eyes are not so dim but that I can still feel happy in waiting on the fair majesty of France. My life is at her service!"

It were needless to say that, after this flattering *amende* of Catherine, and the grateful reply of her servant, perfect amity was re-established between them.

"The King of Navarre," continued De Biron, in relating to her majesty the result of his last visit to the captive monarch, "appeared more uneasy in my presence than formerly."

"There is some mystery in this," said Catherine, contracting her brow; "we are either dupes to our suspicious fancies—or there is a plot hatching."

"Cannot the Queen of Navarre illumine us?" asked the governor, still ignorant of the adventure of the countess.

"Yes, with an *ignis fatuus*," answered the queen-mother in a tone of bitterness. "I think, if we were fools enough to go, she would, with all her heart, send us on a visit to our old ally the Turk, or to the new world of Columbus!"—

"By our lady of Loretto!" continued she, rising from her chair in anger, "I can depend on none of them. But why must I be annoyed with these trifles? I foresee, marshal, that your charge will be increased. All Navarre's side of the palace shall be turned into a prison-ward, and François shall keep company with the Bourbon and his wife!"

"Heaven forbid the necessity!" exclaimed the poor governor, terrified at the prospect.

"Let there be more guards in the Tuileries," added Catherine; "it is not safe for Navarre to walk in the gardens out of sight of the sentinels. It is true our eye is upon him when he leaves the palace—and when he enters the gardens—but once within, he is lost to our scrutiny. Yes!" continued she, after a pause, "the circuit of the Tuileries must be patrolled while the captive is there. Can your wisdom increase our security, marshal?"

"He may burrow under ground like a rabbit, and so get away," replied De Biron, dryly.

"Ah! you laugh at our caution!" exclaimed the queen-mother, her anger giving way to mirth, in which the marshal

joined ; they stood smiling at each other as confederates oft-times do at a ludicrous turn in their intricate policy.

"God alone can reward us both for our troubles in this huge world of a warren," said Catherine. The marshal durst not trust himself with a reply, but again smiled, and bowed himself out of her presence.

CHAPTER III.

Malgré ce doux genre de vie
Dont il avoit été charmé,
Il vint à s'ennuyer de se voir enfermé
La Prison la plus charmante
Est toujours une prison.

In every society, from the refined circle of the court to the group of rustic village gossips, the discovery of the slightest incident affecting the character, or descriptive of the errors, of any one of its members, is discussed as a theme of the deepest personal interest. Whether the pleasure of the listener, or of the narrator of the tale is more intense, we need not determine, as the most adroit of both sexes usually contrive to enjoy both offices successively. Such was the fortune of Madame D'Usez.

Candales was uneasy till she had disburthened her memory of its charge to the ready, sympathizing ears of her friends ; and Madame *la Duchesse*, duly informed of each circumstance of the adventure, to which it was in her power to add, by way of embellishment, the affected airs of the heroine, in themselves worthy of deep and interesting comment on a leisure morn, repaired alone to the boudoir of the Queen of Navarre.

The entire suite of rooms inhabited by the daughter of Catherine and her captive husband, had been, in consequence of a mutual wish, equally divided between the illustrious and aversely inclined pair ; the location was admirably adapted for independence of each other's society, at the same time that the etiquette of the court, and above all, the complexion of Catherine's policy, which would not have brooked an undisguised separation, was duly maintained. According to the prevailing fashion of palatial residences, which has not been yet changed, the innermost chamber of the royal suite was selected for re-

pose ; and the more distant each successive room from this sanctuary, the more public the use to which it was appropriated.

Whether a closer approximation were deemed inadvisable, we cannot say, but between the dormitory of Margaret and that of her consort, was interpolated an untenanted chamber, disused of both its royal neighbours, save when crossed by the feet of either on the rare occasion of paying a visit.

From this point of debateable land, or, to speak more truly, uncontested territory, branched off their respective suites of rooms ; those of Navarre towards the cape of *L'Isle du Palais*, which now affords support to the centre arch of *Pont Neuf* ; while those of Margaret ran westward in the direction of the unfinished gallery of the Louvre and the gardens of the Tuileries.

D'Usez found the princess in her boudoir adjoining the royal dormitory. No private apartment could compete with this, the selected object of her majesty's taste. The walls were covered with Flemish tapestry, but the pictorial embellishments had not been left to the discretion of the artists of that country, as their judgment was oftentimes to be less preferred than their unvarying skill and industry. The subject of the designs had been chosen by Margaret herself from the classic storehouse lately unlocked by the translators of her own and of the preceding age.

The floor of the boudoir, although boasting of a grain as susceptible of polish as ebony, was doomed by the luxurious taste of the queen to be hidden beneath a carpet of tapestry, on which were worked the armorial quarterings of the house of Valois. A series of portraits, by French and Italian artists, was suspended around the chamber, which breathed a delicious atmosphere, imparted by fragrant-scented herbs.

When the duchess entered, Margaret was alone, and seated on a magnificent couch ; her feet imbedded on a footstool, its yielding softness shared by a diminutive greyhound of the Italian breed.

The Queen of Navarre was tall, symmetrically proportioned, and possessed of features worthy of a daughter of her imperial mother. She was somewhat older than her consort, and had reached the full beauty of her womanhood ; the charm most praised by the courtiers, and to gaze on which, the Archduke of Austria had declared it worthy of a journey from Vienna in the severest winter, was the beauty of her complexion. In the language of the chronicler, it was like the unsunned side of

the white cherry ; a metaphor, we opine, doing but little justice to the admiration of Europe. Her eyes were large, voluptuous, and heart-subduing ; riveting with a spell-like power the gaze of the beholder, if he dared venture to meet their glance.

The female fashions of the French court were fast degenerating, from a simple and elegant style of dress to that consummation of ungainliness, the hooped petticoat ; *vertu-gardin*, as it was called in France, the etymology of which is obvious ; and farthingale in England. But as yet the evil was not ; coming events cast their shadows before, and the budding existence of the *vertu-gardin* might be only indicated in a certain fulness of the skirts and lowness of the waist.

In this latter fashion was apparelled the Queen of Navarre. It was as yet too early in the morning to be decorated in the cumbrous robe of velvet, or of cloth of gold or silver, and covered with precious stones ; yet her dress was nearly as gaudy, and consisted of a robe of white satin, charged, to use an heraldic phrase, with spangles. Over her dark hair, in the arrangement of which might also be traced an indication of an approach to an artificial costume—being carried back from the forehead and temples to cluster in a towering mass, sprinkled over with sparkling gems—was thrown a veil of gauze, which hung down negligently on each side of the head, allowing the fine face of the princess to be visible, and half concealing beneath the folds the lustre of the jewels which decorated her hair.

Between Margaret and the duchess there existed a close intimacy, although the political confidant of the queen-mother did not possess the confidence of the Queen of Navarre ; but D'Usez found it advisable to court her majesty's friendship, and was on the present, as on every other visit, very graciously received.

There was a secret distrust also on the part of madame, for Margaret occupied the very station in the court which the former ardently coveted ; and had the rank of the fair scion of Valois been less illustrious, the duchess would not have been able to overcome her secret envy. The fair Navarre was universally designated the Queen of Hearts—the Venus of the Court—to whom all paid homage as a duty. Whatever dress or ornament she adopted looked most appropriate, was spoken of with raptures by her devotees, and became the fashion of the ladies who were anxious to share in the admiration by wearing her colours.

This was the empire for which D'Usez sighed. In her office of political adviser to Catherine, she exercised a great influence over the noblesse, as many preferments passed through her hands. But she had besides an ambition to shine as a Queen of Hearts; she desired that homage paid to her beauty which was rendered to her political influence; but though beautiful and witty, she was as much dreaded as admired; the glance of her eye was sharp, and her power of sarcasm equally so; she had chosen the commanding career of a favourite, and she could not sit at once in the rival courts of Love and Majesty.

But too wise to quarrel with, or even to display jealousy of the fair queen, prudence had taught her rather to form an alliance with her superior in influence and beauty, and by this pacific measure the ambitious lady became in some degree the partner of her empire.

Margaret, as we have said, was alone, unless indeed the greyhound be accounted a companion; and there are moods of a royal mind when even the society of a dumb friend of capacity as limited as the sharer of her majesty's footstool, may be deemed preferable to a courtly train.

Though the meditations of the queen were profound, it may be doubted by many whether the subject under consideration merited that term: but profundity may be predicated of the action of the mind, without embracing the quality of the subject scrutinized.

That the princess was deeply engaged cannot be doubted: that the pursuit was frivolous may be denied, if her vocation be considered. She set the fashion in dress; and was, when interrupted by D'Usez, earnestly debating whether she should countenance an innovation of De Condé, who had substituted curved arabesque devices of jewellery in front of the stomacher, sleeves, and skirts of her state-garments, instead of the straight and angular rows of precious stones displayed by Margaret and her followers. The innovation in itself was a crime, but the taste of the queen acknowledged the elegance of the effect; and she felt disposed to pardon the assumption.

The duchess came very seasonably to aid the Queen of Navarre in coming to a decision, but to the question whether the fashion of the Princess de Condé were worthy of adoption, madame would not pretend to determine; she was besides, as she declared, so interested in an adventure which had befallen Candales, and in which the Duke d'Alençon was implicated. Curved lines, as well as the straight radiations of a circle,

were immediately forgotten ; the curiosity of the queen was excited, and she desired to be informed of the particulars which related to her brother François. Hereupon D'Usez detailed the scene which had just occurred in the cabinet of the queen-mother, and in which she did not fail to depict, with a few sarcastic touches, the affectation of the countess.

Margaret heard, with the tranquillity of one indifferent to the result, the determination of the ladies, sanctioned by the queen-mother, to surprise D'Alençon and his companion at their evening assignation ; but she thought within herself, and her opinion coincided with the surmise of Catherine, and was opposed to the judgment of D'Usez, that a more important affair than a love-passage would be unmasked in the hall by Candales' discovery. She instantly made up her mind to dis-appoint her mother and the ladies of the household.

"Is it not unbecoming the dignity of one who interferes in the destinies of Europe," asked Margaret, "to stoop to the meditated plot? The affair is worthy of Candales—and as for De Condé, it is entirely within her province—but for you, madame—"

"Well ! I own it is a trifle," exclaimed the duchess, interrupting her, "but can I be otherwise than restless just now—there is nothing acting in the great world—the Huguenots and their English friends are still sleeping, and the Papal Legate is composed into a slumber, by her majesty and myself. What can I be doing? It is impossible to be always quiet."

At this instant a gentle knocking at the queen's dormitory interrupted the duchess in her excuses. Margaret was surprised at the circumstance ; she was certain no one had passed into her chamber ; and she changed her half recumbent position more hastily than became the usual graceful ease of the Queen of Hearts, and more quickly than pleased the discontented Fidelio, who was ejected from his velvet throne. The duchess smiled.

"Now there is an adventure worthy of your curiosity," said Margaret, who had perceived the smile ;—"should you like to discover who is in yon chamber? If I were to grant permission, would it not be gratifying to your hatred of repose as entering upon a treaty with Spain!"

"Umph!" said the duchess to herself ; "this is as clever a mode of carrying off an unpleasant occurrence as a woman could think of! I should, indeed, like to open the door much more readily than you would grant me permission. But I can now return your retort in kind!"

D'Usez arose from her chair, and telling Margaret that she would show her how easily she could conquer her curiosity, made a low courtesy and prepared to leave the room. But the queen would not suffer this insinuating attack to pass unparried; and calling back the dark-eyed lady, said—

“My dear D'Usez! I am too idle to rise from my seat—do favour me by opening the door for the intruder, whoever it may be.”

I may be wrong! thought the confidant of the queen-mother, as she obeyed her friend's behest. “Mortal or immortal, you have permission to enter!” cried D'Usez, in a loud tone, as she stood by the door, which immediately opened, and disclosed no less a personage than the King of Navarre. The vision was as unexpected to the queen as to the duchess.

Whatever might prove the cause of the visit, Margaret was highly gratified with his appearance, as it afforded her a complete triumph over the imputation conveyed in her friend's sarcastic retort, and confirmed her in her intention of disappointing the ladies and her good parent in the object of their evening adventure, in which she felt certain, from many circumstances, her consort was implicated. But however pleased the queen might be, she did not care to display it; and to the captive monarch, who appeared rather confused, as though he did not desire a witness to their interview, she said in an idle tone—

“To what cause am I indebted for this honour? Mayhap your majesty is anxious to trace some object which the hotel in the opposite Fauxbourg hinders you from seeing in your own chamber!”

“No! no!” exclaimed the duchess, who had accidentally caught a glimpse of the Seine—her eyes directed to the window by the observation of Margaret, we must look nearer home! Behold the mystery in yonder boat, with its gay attire! But really it is cruel in me to break the spell of such precious moments!”

And so saying, the lady withdrew, not at all anxious to witness what had long ceased to excite either surprise or curiosity,—the matrimonial indifferences of the royal couple.

“This is a delightful little paradisé,” exclaimed Navarre, looking around, “and those pictures! That of yourself—how like! The fairest lily of France!”

Margaret courtesied lowly in return for the unusual fervour of his address; though she perceived that the flattery was only the prelude to a request.

"And who is the painter who has rendered such a miracle with his pencil?" asked the monarch.

"You are not cunning enough in your policy, most illustrious captive," answered the Queen of Navarre. "I have heard you declare before all the court that you knew the touch of Corneille at a moment's glance. Whither has flown your skill? But speak your wishes at once—I am in perfectly good-humour to grant every thing reasonable—and I will listen to your encomiums afterward!"

"Have I then lived so long under the roof of the De Medicis without acquiring any portion of her skill—does my secret wish lie pictured on my forehead?" cried the perplexed Bourbon.

"Still doubtful of my generosity!" exclaimed Margaret. "Well! listen, Navarre! and gain courage, while I describe to you the subject of a picture which I have engaged Corneille to paint! But, before I describe the moment seized by the artist, I must relate the previous accidents. Two friends, both of the highest rank, have met in a dark chamber in the depth of the night to plan an escape."

The queen remarked a change which came over the features of her captive husband; it verified her suspicion; but without appearing to notice the circumstance, she continued her narrative.

"Some idle ear has caught the assignation—it is reported to others—and believed to be by some an affair of the heart, and that one of the parties engaged is a lady. Well! you seem interested in my sketch! But listen; a surprise has been planned by a bevy of malicious damsels, who will burst in upon the friends with the rude glare of torches, just as it were accidentally."

Navarre was excessively agitated; he scarcely knew whether to interrupt the queen or keep silent; the air of the room threatened suffocation, although it was open to the breezes from the river. Still the fair inquisitor would not notice his suffering, but, laying her hand on his shoulder and looking into his face, she continued—"That must be the moment for the painter—he could, as you are aware, make nothing of the previous darkness. The light of the torches falls upon the friends, and discovers—a lady? Ah! I see you are moved! But it shall be in your own power to determine whether the finale be comic or serious!"

The fair speaker retreated a few paces from her lord, smiling upon his awe-struck figure.

The poor king was electrified; he found himself by some mischance in the power of his wife. The assignation too! that had been overheard. The suspicious questions of De Biron on his last visit, from which he had only just escaped, crossed his mind—he feared every thing was known, and that a close confinement would be his future lot. He stood powerless—an object of pity to his laughing consort, who cried, “Choose, ere I give the last instructions to the painter, you monarch of a suite of rooms and a garden promenade!”

“What! not a word of the fruitful valleys of Bearn and Navarre?” exclaimed D’Alençon, who at that instant threw open the door by which the Bourbon prince had entered, and stood before his astonished sister and his confused friend; —“have the gardens of Pau no existence?” continued the intruder. “It is ever thus that the sex judge of us. What signifies the possession of a province, if one’s shoe is deficient in a rosette? But tell me, Margaret,” added he, addressing his sister, “do they take Navarre to be a lady?”

“Her majesty knows all,” exclaimed Navarre, despairingly. “I suppose I shall not have even a suite of rooms much longer.”

“Know all!” cried the queen; “on the contrary, I cannot even guess why François was listening at my door, or why he should have come at all!”

Navarre, who had been torturing his invention to frame a plausible excuse for the introduction of D’Alençon, who had been waiting with impatience for permission to enter, now judged it prudent to make a full confession of his previous meeting with the prince in the hall: together with the subsequent interview broken off by the arrival of De Biron; the consequent concealment of monsieur, and the fear of the captive lest D’Alençon should be seen leaving his chamber, which had induced him to conduct the prince through her majesty’s rooms, from which he might emerge without suspicion. Upon hearing the voice of the Duchess D’Usez, he had desired his eccentric friend to remain within, while he endeavoured, with what success we have already detailed, to gain a clear passage for the prince.

“I beg your majesty’s pardon,” said Margaret, when her husband had finished the relation. “Not one half of what you now say was pictured on your forehead—but Madame D’Usez and her friends know of my brother’s midnight assignation—it was overheard by the Countess de Candales—”

“—And the subject of our discourse—?” exclaimed the agitated Bourbon prince.

"How foolish!" replied Margaret, affecting contempt, "did I not say but just now that the companion of my brother was supposed to be a lady. Candales heard only the words spoken in the vestibule, and was afraid to look at you till it was too late!" And thereupon the Queen of Navarre informed her consort of what the countess had related to Catherine; and also that the queen-mother had sanctioned a plot to surprise her son.

"Thank Heaven! our conversation in the hall was not overheard!" said Navarre.

"If my good mother had thought her son only engaged in a love affair with one of these petulant damsels who glide about the Louvre," said D'Alençon, "she would never have interfered; but I am sure she suspects his majesty is concerned!"

"And yet," observed Margaret, "she would not have the marshal informed of the circumstance, lest there should be some truth in your being in love, and the name of any of her ladies transpire in consequence."

The conversation which ensued brought about a better understanding between the captive and his fastidious wife, than he could ever have expected from her filial relation with his royal jailer; but it happened fortunately for his interest, that Margaret, for reasons which it will be our object to explain at a future period, was very much disposed to circumvent the plans of her mother.

But notwithstanding this unexpected aid, both D'Alençon and the monarch deemed it too premature to expose the precise nature and extent of their policy, to one who had shown herself a convert of so recent a date, to her consort's interest. They made her believe that nothing more than a vague idea of Navarre's escape from the Louvre had been as yet entertained.

"You must exercise more caution in your future interviews," said Margaret, "while subject to the amiable curiosity of Candales, and the good-nature of Madame D'Usez. But suffer me to bring about the *dénouement* of to-night; and it shall be proved whether I am not worthy of your confidence."

"Willingly," replied Navarre; "words are too feeble to express my thanks for your majesty's kind interest in my unhappy fate. If we had not received this timely warning, to-morrow's sunbeams might have greeted us—myself at least—through the iron-bars of the Bastile."

"And so the nymphs of the Louvre imagine that I am in love with one of their train," cried D'Alençon. "Well, there

are no bounds to the vanity of some people. The ladies of the English court were more modest, and so humble-minded that I was never tormented. Here all feel so piqued at my indifference, that they are ready to join in any cabal to annoy me. And with these words, he left Navarre and his consort to themselves.

The Marshal De Biron was lodged more obscurely in the palace than accorded with the triple honours of Governor of the Louvre, Marshal of France, and Baron by long prescription of an ancient domain ; but although the abode of royalty had long ceased to exhibit the strength of a fortress since the demolition of the old structure, yet the threatened rebellion of the Duke of Guise; his proximity as a dangerous neighbour, and the turbulent excited spirit of the citizens, rendered the strengthening of the palace a matter of necessity.

In order that he might be ready at the slightest hostile movement in the city, the marshal slept in a room on the *rez-de-chaussée*, or ground-floor, near the principal entrance. With the same simple habits which have characterized many of the most illustrious heroes, he dispensed with the numerous corps of servants appertaining to his dignity, and retained about his person one solitary domestic—an old soldier, who had often kept guard over his master on the tented field, and was proud of discharging the same office in the palace.

The quarters of the marshal consisted of but three rooms. From the chamber where he received the reports of his officers, a door opened into the dormitory, beyond which was a small room, occupied every night by *Sieur Jaques*, the military valet.

On the evening of the same day which had brought so much fear to the heart of Navarre, De Biron, after repeating his instructions to Colonel Grillon, the commander of the Swiss, a blunt, honest gentleman, of mediocre pretensions in every quality, mental and physical, save courage and loyalty, retired to his couch at an hour perfectly in keeping with the manners of the age; but which, in the present century, would be accounted quite impracticable. On the table of his bedroom he found a letter addressed to himself, and apparently in a female hand. "What may this be," exclaimed the marshal, rather fluttered, and looking at the seal, which described a town in flames; "is it of love or treason? For women never wrote on other subjects since the world began."

"By the honourable fame of all the De Biron!" continued he, after reading the first line, "it is, indeed, from a lady, and

on the gentlest subject. I am ever fortunate! and yet I am not handsome—cannot dance the pazzameno, nay, not even the pavanne, since the affair at Dreux. But I have the air of a gentleman; true nobility gleams through the furrows of my face—and my tongue—ah! there lies the mischief! A skilful tongue is like a large field culverin, which proves victor over the bloom and chivalry of youth. It is now six months since I had an affair of the heart; and during this long period, the fascinating Candales has been ever gliding across my vision like a goddess. And I have noted often that her glances are thrown on me, when the duke in vain strives to arrest those bright orbs of light. It must be from her! Yet there is no signature; but that was only prudent: my lackey might have opened the letter;—though poor Jaques cannot read.”

The marshal continued alternately soliloquizing and reading the epistle, which was of the most tender description; the writer reproaching him for breathing such insinuating flatteries, and declaring that she would retire from the palace, but was anxious, ere she forsook the Louvre, to see him, and declare her forgiveness of his conduct. Where was there a more secluded and undisturbed spot, continued the fair scribe, than the hall of the Louvre at night? where he might hear her farewell reproaches without seeing her blushes! The letter concluded by naming the hour for the interview; and threatening that if he made light of her passion, there were modes of vengeance which made even a woman all-powerful:

“Retiring from the palace!” exclaimed De Biron, imitating the tone of voice of a languishing lady. “But how cunning these nymphs are!” continued he. “Revenge, indeed! So like the sex, who offer love in one hand and a dagger in the other.”

It is but doing justice to the prudence of the marshal, to declare that such assignations, and from the other sex, were common enough in his days; and that he had had no reason to complain of neglect.

The appointment raised his spirits above their ordinary level; but in proportion as his ideas of happiness were enlarged, so was a disposition to be dissatisfied with the duties imposed on him by Catherine engendered. He railed against the queen-mother for loading him with responsibility, not the least portion of which was the custody of Navarre.

“If it were not for such engagements as these,” exclaimed he, looking at the letter, “what would life be worth? Glory a mere breath! Love a real paradise! I never blamed Marc

Anthony! I never blamed my first master, Francis! But stay: I should like to know how this delightful *billet* was brought here."

He opened the door of his servant's room, and finding from audible evidence that the old soldier was fast asleep, he struck the floor repeatedly with his sword, at the same time crying out "Jaques! Jaques!"

"Augh! Augh!" growled out a voice, "Montjoie! St. Denis! De Biron to the rescue—charge for his life—my poor master's flung!"

"You lie, Jaques!" exclaimed the marshal, cutting short the harangue of the still sleeping soldier, and replying in the same strain, "I am triumphant! There are six lance lengths between us and the Ritters! Charge through them and attack in the rear!"

By this time, Jaques was fully awake, and sat up in his bed; and if there had been sufficient light, would have presented the features of a rough old soldier, who had served in all the Huguenot wars; a true, stout-hearted man-at-arms, who loved his lance and his steed better than a calm life at the Louvre.

"Did you see any letter in my room?" asked the marshal.

"Yes, monseigneur," replied Jaques.

"Do you know how it came there, or who brought it?"

"No," answered Jaques.

"Then go to sleep again, and forget it," rejoined De Biron, and left the room.

It wanted yet two hours of the time appointed for the interview, and the Governor of the Louvre, who could not sleep, amused himself in turning his mistress's epistle into Greek metre. This was an easy task, and completed within the time; and he walked up and down the room, repeating the lines, and correcting the quantities, till the moment of his going to the hall.

"Beneath the farthest window," said the marshal to himself, as he stepped carefully along the floor of the dark hall. "She will know it to be me by my awkward steps," thought he, as he approached the spot. But there was no lady visible. He must be before his time;—as a soldier ought to be.

"I shall surprise her!" muttered De Biron, as he took his station in the recess.

Presently he perceived the door open half-way—the lighted space was darkened by a figure—the door closed—footsteps were heard; and as they approached, a rough voice cried out, "The last window but one,—*ma chère amie*:—art thou there?"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed the marshal, inwardly, "that is Colonel Grillon—and he, too, about to meet his mistress! How unlucky! Suppose my *Psyche* should mistake the window; or, what is worse, the Swiss fancy her his own *Thiabe*, and rush out, as she comes trippingly to my bower!"

"What, not come yet!" said Grillon, looking in vain into the recess adjoining the retreat of the marshal, who shrunk within himself as never warrior shrunk before. "Well! here I stand—the sentinel of Cupid!"

"Curse you and Cupid too!" exclaimed the fretful governor to himself; "I never knew this hall was so much used. By the house of De Biron, I will not suffer it! It must not be! Grillon is the most useful man I have, or I would cut his throat."

The colonel, who could not remain quiet, began singing a provincial chanson, but in a tone scarcely above a whisper. Every word grated upon the nerves of the governor with the ruthless stroke of an inquisitor's brand. There were two lines repeated at the close of each stanza—"My lady-love, when art thou coming?" supposed to be addressed by the cavalier; and the other, a consolatory remark of the damsel, "The warder knew his voice so well!"

The attempt of the Swiss to render the difference of sex distinguishable by vocal contrast, was almost beyond endurance. But still the prudence of the marshal obtained the mastery of his more irritable faculties; and he gradually became calmer.

"What a sympathy there is in love!" thought he; "my fair ~~one~~ writes—where is there a better and securer place than the hall of the palace?—Cupid must have put the idea into her head; and then, like a wicked imp as he has ever been, flown straight to Grillon's mistress, and whispered the same thought into her ear. One would almost believe in the existence of an amorous deity superintending these matters, if it were only for the care he has taken to assign us, fortunately, different windows. But, in Cupid's name, what will be the result—I tremble for the surprise of my captivating—dare I say countess—No! it must not be—I will order Grillon under arrest, or he may discover her—"

"The warder knew his voice so well!" sung out the colonel, unconscious of the destiny which awaited him, and with a voice growing louder through impatience.

But De Biron was prevented from executing his gallant resolve by the sudden opening of the hall-door. A lady, with a long veil descending to the feet, was seen to enter, bearing in

her hand a lamp, which throwing its beams upon the white veil and under dress, and making visible her silent, stealthy progress, invested the approach of the figure with an appearance almost supernatural.

However, the impatient colonel was proof against fear, and rushed out from his place of concealment, and De Biron, who thought the spectre resembled the countess in stature, stumbled forward to rescue his innamorato from the grasp of the reckless Swiss; but the lady, starting at the vision of two beings of the other sex, screamed aloud, and flinging down the taper, flew to the door, which opened, and again closed upon her.

Grillon would have pursued the lady, but finding an intruder in the rear, the rude cause, as he imagined, of her flight, he became excessively enraged, and cried out to his opponent—

"It would have been well, you villain, if mademoiselle had left the taper burning, that I might see the way to your rascally heart! You black wretch, to force yourself on our interview! You eaves-dropper! But my blade shall prick you though in the dark!"

It will be no difficult matter, thought De Biron, as I cannot stir ~~very~~ quickly—yet it is a pity one of us should slay the other.

The marshal was for several moments unresolved on the course he should pursue—we need not say, he had no fear of the colonel's sword—but he was the governor of the Louvre, and a marshal of the French armies; and Grillon, a bluff, honest soldier, who was besides his very good friend. He thought it more becoming both his rank and prudence that the affair should be hushed up; and, to the surprise of his antagonist, he announced his rank. An explanation ensued, and the unfortunate adventure became a subject of laughter.

"If the two ladies had come together," observed the marshal, "I should not have known which was my mistress, except by guess—and that, it appears, was your case. But—hark! there is a noise at the door, Grillon—perhaps the other damsel—what shall we do?"

"The fairest way," replied the Swiss, good-humouredly, "would be to go and ask mademoiselle, or madame, which of us she prefers."

"Let us do so!" rejoined De Biron; and they both walked towards the door, which was of a sudden thrown open, and displayed the indignant Catherine, surrounded by her ladies, and the Swiss guards with torches. The two friends halted.

"Seize the ——," exclaimed the queen ; but farther speech was lost in astonishment at seeing her trusty officers in place of more dangerous night-walkers.

"We expected to surprise conspirators, marshal," said Catherine, recovering herself ; "it is pleasanter to meet friends than enemies !"

De Biron's sagacity instantly suggested a plot, and that the love-epistle had been a snare. Although humiliated at the discovery of the deception, he thought it would be safer to acquaint her majesty with the truth, lest she should suspect his fidelity ; and in furtherance of this resolve, he handed her the letter.

By the aid of the torch-light, Catherine perused the sentimental epistle. Her anger kindled in being thus outwitted, and her friends made a jest of ; and as the features of the De Medicis glowed in the ensanguined tint of the red light, she recalled to the classical fancy of the marshal the figure of Medea in one of the fits of anger of that imperial vixen. But madame, the queen-mother, never fretted herself with self-torments—she soon recovered her quiet mood to dream of future vengeance. When she had finished the letter, she returned it to the marshal, with an intimation that it might be required again.

"If Chicot were not at Vincennes," whispered Madame D'Usez to the queen, "I should judge him guilty of the mischief."

Grillon found himself most awkwardly situated in being exposed to the laughter of the ladies ; which her majesty perceiving, spoke to the marshal in a low voice. De Biron replied in a whisper, which caused the queen to exclaim—

"And Grillon too !"

It is the highest point to which a courtier's genius can rise, to be able to bear without the least appearance of disquiet, or nervous movement of body, features, or expression, the laugh of ridicule ; and if he should exceed in this, we would venture to say that the ridicule would fall on his assailant. But we despair of the miracle. The colonel, as we have already intimated, was not a man of genius, but he had tact and good sense ; and feeling his incapability of wearing a smooth unaltered brow amid the satirical laughter of his fair tormentors, royal and noble, he yet availed himself cleverly of a resource at hand.

Perceiving the irregular station of the Swiss, he growled out in true military fashion the word of command. The troops obeyed their officer, and formed in double line. Another command—and they presented arms. Catherine, who knew how to appreciate talent, nodded complacently ; the troops were put

in motion, the whole *cortège* passed slowly out of the hall, and the colonel escaped clear out of the arena.

Very few of the actors or assistants in the drama slept that night. Each had his or her mystery to solve, but speculation ended only in a labyrinth of conjectures. Catherine was very certain that the Countess Candales could not have been mistaken in the identity of François D'Alençon; and her own suspicions pointed at the King of Navarre as his probable companion.

But whoever were the parties, or by whatever means they had been able to frustrate the scheme planned for their discovery, the queen-mother resolved that her own subtlety should overmatch their finesse.

CHAPTER IV.

Extremes, though contrary, have the like effects;
Extreme heat mortifies, like extreme cold——

CHAPMAN'S ALL FOOLS.

On the evening subsequent to De Biron's untoward love affair, a horseman was seen riding in the direction of the river along the pleasant causeway near Vincennes, which after skirting the forest and royal domain, leads to the banks of the Marne. That he was no stranger in that quarter might be inferred from the familiarity of many of the passers by; though his want of courtesy seldom allowed him to acknowledge the proffered salute, or if indeed he did condescend so far, it was returned with more contempt than friendliness. From way-faring and unknown travellers, he met with, however, a greeting more akin with his own deficiency of urbanity; while the gape of astonishment which commenced their equivocal civilities, and the rude mirth and jest which continued till they were out of hearing, seemed to irritate him more than became a man of his independent bearing. He was extremely well mounted, and in that respect nowise an object of contempt; and his school of riding, though somewhat extravagant, betrayed neither ignorance nor inexperience. But who could behold his dress—or even, were that concealed, his head only,—without astonishment and laughter?

His face was large, flat, and broad, and of a mealy complexion, graced with prominent eyes of a stony lustre ; the mouth capacious, and on each side, commencing at the corner of the nose and falling chinward, was a deep furrow formed by the play of the muscles. Though the organic and habitual indications of mirth were apparent, yet his general manner was grave and serious to an excess—there was, to speak almost paradoxically, a humorous want of cheerfulness in his face ; its unvarying solemnity of expression irritated the mirth of all beholders.

He wore a cap with an odd drooping continuation in lieu of feather, and a doublet closely fitting his square frame ; it was of the same colour as the cap, a light drab ; a colour, perhaps, adopted to match with his complexion. His legs were cased tightly in cloth, but of distinct colours ; the dexter limb being red, while its fellow was as green as a meadow in spring.

Onward rode this strange personage, scarcely looking at those who assumed acquaintance with him, and answering the jests of the ruder strangers only by fixing his stony eyes upon them with a look of calm abstraction and unearthliness. But he took great delight in a rencounter with children ; they were almost the only beings who moved him from his unbending humour. It was his custom on such an occasion to fix his eyes on a particular spot of the road, pointing to it likewise with his forefinger. If, on looking back at a distance, he saw that the children were still searching for the invisible godsend, then awoke his laugh, loud and discordant enough to frighten any horse but his own *Trista Verita* of incomparable training.

He had left the château and forest of Vincennes far behind, when his attention was arrested by a young man on horseback approaching him at a rapid pace.

The good or ill fortune of Chicot, for such was the name of our friend of the parti-coloured legs, depended on the caprice of man ; he was, therefore, learned in physiognomy, and when the stranger stopped to make inquiry about the road, Chicot was so lost in pleasure and astonishment that he heard not the traveller's questions, but murmured to himself, " Nature never does things but by halves ! What a pity this man has not my face and figure ! He might have gained a fortune in any court in Europe !"

The stranger thus unconsciously apostrophized was young, and though not positively a model of beauty, his features were interesting enough to attract the eyes of women ; we are certain he would never willingly have exchanged persons with

Chicot, though it were to gain a province. The expression of his eye was bland and amiable—yet its power was very great, and it never sank involuntarily before the gaze of man. He grew impatient at the silence of our large-faced friend, who now lost in the rising expression of anger all those delicate traces of humour which he had discovered in the visage of the young traveller. “Ah!” thought Chicot, still regardless of replying to the other’s inquiries, “this anger is too lofty! At first sight, I never saw a man whom I judged so well qualified to become my successor! Humour lurked about his mouth, even as Marshal De Biron said, Cupid hovered over the lips of our fair Queen of Navarre! Yet he now wears the angry frown of the marshal himself! He may be by his dress a merchant—and by his haughtiness a rich Marseillois, who thinks himself entitled to feel angry like a gentleman. Well! I’ll try his skill! If his wit prove equal to his looks, I should like to induce him to leave off vending silks, and attach himself to me and Brother Henry.”

While Chicot was indulging these reflections, the stranger waxed wroth at his uncourteous silence, and was only restrained from a more open demonstration of anger by the wonder excited by the face and habiliments of him from whom he had been in vain trying to elicit information.

“Can I reach the city before the gates are closed?” at last shouted out the traveller.

“Do you know me?” said the eccentric Chicot, determined to put his questioner to the trial.

“No,” replied the stranger, “but I judge I am near Paris by a specimen of its folly.”

“And what may your judgment take me for?” asked Chicot.

“A very silent, quietly-disposed man!” rejoined the stranger, in a tone of pretended bitterness: “I have no doubt, when the doctors of the University want a chart of the moon’s surface, they take an impression of your face!”

“A la bonne heure!” said our friend to himself. Then speaking aloud to his antagonist, without betraying any anger, he asked, “And what have you come to Paris for?”

“Curiosity and traffic,” replied the traveller. “I was led to expect every day a festival of amusement; and behold! a pair of carnival legs come forth to greet me!”

“You delight in such guise, then?” said Chicot. “You can see the wit of the contrast?” at the same time throwing his leg over the horse’s head, and clapping his limbs together.

"The wit is much too palpable for my taste," replied the stranger. "I can see as much folly in the possessor of every pair of legs I meet, though not clothed in red and green."

"But the owners of such undignified supporters," said Chicot, "have not the license to point out the moral of every tale they hear."

"And what else but dull eyes," retorted the stranger, "need the moral to be pointed out? Would a hunter have his game tied by the leg? I am too poor to keep a fool—therefore would I see folly in every one I meet. I have no doubt the next traveller will not be able to conceal his red and green from me, though his hose be of Flemish brown. But by the forthcoming night! I deserve to change garments with you for staying here, when I ought to be making straight for the barriers."

"You are, then, so eager to be within the walls of Paris?" said the jester.

"So enchanted with the type of its inhabitants!" replied the traveller, smiling.

"The barriers will be closed before you are half way," said Chicot, composedly.

"Then I am a fool outright," rejoined the young stranger; "let us exchange caps."

"Wonderful! The very man I took him for!" thought the jester; "I must secure him—he shall bid adieu to silks and nutmegs—Brother Henry shall be witness of his quality this very night." Then raising his voice, he said—

"Many a wise man has lost his lodging by staying to pluck wisdom on the road-side. But although you will be too late for Paris, there are three places open to you. First, the inn at Vincennes, crowded with the Swiss guard of the castle, who stay to drink. Secondly, the Abbey St. Antoine, nearer Paris, tenanted by good monks and bad housekeepers: do not go there unless you are under a vow of abstinence—a folly much to be shunned. The third, last, and best place for a traveller like yourself, is in the bosom of the forest. Instead of keeping along the public road to Vincennes on the edge of the royal domain, enter it by the first path, which will conduct you to a monastery, the very best in France for good living. Insist on seeing Brother Henry: he is shy at first, but will make you a happy man during your stay. And before we part," continued he, taking a ring off his finger, and presenting it to the stranger, "wear this token of my esteem. I prophecy your future fortune."

The stranger smiled and took the ring, which was curiously ornamented, and of value. "Accept this in return," said he, giving Chicot one of his own, and adding significantly, "Visit me in my prosperity."

They saluted each other profoundly, and with an air of mock gravity so irresistibly serious, that the scene of parting would have made the fortune of any pair of histrionic mimics. Chicot, riding away in a contrary direction, muttered to himself,

"How perverse is nature ! If that young man had my face, there is not a prince in Europe but would give the lands of three bishoprics and half-a-dozen baronies for the fee-simple of his wit. If Brother Henry suffer him to escape, I will say, in the face of the whole court, that he deserves to wear my cap for a week."

The young traveller found, without any difficulty, the road through the forest, and hastened to the convent, amusing himself the while with speculating on the singular adventure he had just encountered. The judgment of Chicot respecting his disposition and humour, was sagacious ; for the stranger was, indeed, very prone to enjoy himself with the follies of his neighbours and chance companions, and had often placed himself in imminent danger by his ill-timed mirth. He was now journeying to Paris on a mission of secrecy, with which he had been entrusted by those who entertained a good opinion of his talents and his subtlety ; and had it not been for this fool's nature of his, which often required the utmost exertion of his nobler faculties to counterbalance its mischievous tendency, he might have ranked as a master-spirit of France. There is a time for all things ; there was a proper season for his merriment ; but he allowed humour to usurp the sway over graver feelings, till it had become a tyrant too strong to be deposed, and he was forced to submit to its despot sway.

The artist and the statesman are both skilful in detecting the foibles and the follies of men ; but while the artist—whether actor, poet, or simple humourist—heeds only the perception of passing folly and its natural delineation, the statesman beholds in it his own strength—the talisman of his power. The misfortune of our young traveller was in being too much of an artist, while diplomatically engaged—an innate disposition so palpable to the physiognomical skill of the clear-sighted Chicot, that the wily jester, ignorant of his condition, had already cast his nets about to engage him in his own honourable profession.

But to account more fully for the motive of Chicot in sending his new acquaintance to the convent, it will be necessary to explain the connexion between the jester and Brother Henry. We must therefore take the license of our vocation to travel with greater speed than our young friend, and introduce the reader to the interior of the holy abode, while the traveller is still lingering in the forest.

The convent, anciently called Grandmontans, was situated in the midst of the royal domain of Vincennes. On the edge of the forest nearest to the Parisian suburb St. Antoine, stood the old feudal Castle of Vincennes, and a village of the same name contiguous. A path led through the forest from the castle to the convent, by which the public road was avoided: a happy circumstance, as will be shown, for the fame of Grandmontans.

The evening assembly of the brotherhood of the convent presented to the eye a picture far different from every other religious institution in France. Instead of a group of mature and aged monks, in coarse brown robes and shaven crowns, let the reader imagine, in the centre of the antique chamber, a long table surrounded by men, chiefly in the lustre of their youth, apparelled in white woollen robes; each displaying on his head locks as luxuriant as nature and the toilet, in aid, could produce. Behold Brother Henry seated in the Superior's chair! His hands white as those of the fair Margaret of Navarre; his fingers encircled with gems as brilliant as any treasured up in the caskets of the Queen of Hearts, or glittering on the fingers of Madame D'Usez, and rivalling, but ineffectually, the brilliancy of her dark glancing eyes! And what may be the worldly rank of these ecclesiastics?

Let the reader behold in Brother Henry, Henry of Valois, monarch of France! Let him see, in the woollen robes of the fraternity, the most renowned peers of the kingdom! In Grandmontans were congregated, the Dukes of Bouillon, Joyeuse, and D'Espernon and many more of the most ancient and noble names of France! A religious fraternity! often as strict in their devotion and self-imposed penance as the holiest of monks; yet very often as gay and revelsome as they had a right to be under a less sanctified garb.

Henry of Valois was often a hard problem for his mother Catherine to solve; to us he is an enigma. Sincerity in his religious faith he undoubtedly possessed: to say that it was clouded with superstition, is only saying that he was a monarch flourishing in the sixteenth century. Moderation and good

sense he gave proofs of, by abstaining equally from the cruel bigotry of the Catholics and the levelling spirit of the Huguenots; firmness, beyond what his mother dreamed of, he showed, in ridding himself of a gigantic evil which threatened his security.

Yet these, the good points of his character, he reached only with an effort—in time of need. The general complexion of his life was that of a weak, extravagant, and superstitious prince. Yet, amid all his follies and fantasies, there shone a glimmering ray of light, indicating an effort after better things, and sometimes kindling into a blaze worthy of a hero and a statesman. Let his character be unfolded with our history; we will now only instance the mental struggling which led to his incongruous assumption of a religious costume.

When he returned from Poland to take possession of the throne of France, he beheld with sorrow the religious distraction of the country; he saw that the outrageousness and license of the Catholic priesthood had driven whole provinces to embrace the doctrines of Calvin and his disciples; but Henry, who was, as we have said, a sincere Catholic, disliked the Huguenot heresy as much as the priestly bigotry of the hierarchy. With the spirit of a good Christian, and the patriotism of a wise prince, he conceived the idea of a religious reformation, and immediately set about the accomplishment of so desirable a change. Here was the ray of a nobler purpose than ever budded in the mind of his temporizing mother, who balanced the strength of her factious subjects without attempting to remove their prejudices. But Henry was unequal to his task. By refusing to co-operate with the priesthood in the extermination of heresy, he gained their hatred, while his spiritual design, through lack of spiritual fervour, degenerated into a devotion half superstitious, half hypocritical; exposing him to the contemptuous invectives of his priestly assailants, and the laughter of their flocks.

He instituted a lay fraternity in his court, composed of favourites and the officers of the palace. Heaven, he believed, would be moved at the sight of the lowly penitence and humiliation of a luxurious court, to pity the misfortunes of the kingdom. It could not, he imagined, resist the prayer of a monarch in sackcloth, but would yield to entreaties so humbly uttered, and remove all dissension and civil strife. Hence were to be seen in the streets of Paris, on stated days, processions of the royal brotherhood of penitents, who, in garb of sackcloth, walked to Notre Dame to supplicate remission

for their sins, and the sins of France ! The brotherhood had a convent in the city, to which they retired to spend the remainder of the day in devotion. But it was not to be expected that the gay nobles of the Louvre could be metamorphosed into ascetic monks. To please their sovereign, they might adopt any costume he chose, however symbolical of holiness ; but their sense of pleasure was as lively under one dress as another, and they soon contrived to make their in-door penitence a very pleasant, social season ; and with that sense of self-delusion which often co-exists with hypocrisy, many still believed that they were performing a religious duty.

His majesty, however, in whom a germ of real devotion existed, had frequent misgivings of the sanctity of this course of devotion, and determined upon having a house of penitence beyond the walls of Paris, to which no servants were to be admitted to administer to their luxury, but all the fraternity made to perform their own offices of necessity ; by which means he hoped to preserve, during his sojourn there, a true monastic humility.

While staying at the Castle of Vincennes, to which retreat he had resorted for the purpose of contemplating, at his leisure, the foundation of a new religious order of knighthood—the cross and badge of St. Michael having grown into disesteem—he was struck with the appropriate site of the convent of Grandmontants, and presenting its occupants, the monks of the Minime foundation, with a better domicile elsewhere, they forsook the holy roof, to make room for his own beloved penitents.

Thus were the fraternity—to the amusement of the court, the laughter of the nobility, the deep concern and scandal of the pious burgesses and lower orders—installed in the occupation of two houses of abstinence and prayer.

Such were the fruits of the praiseworthy resolution of Valois to improve the state of religion in his kingdom. And however ridiculous the means—and abused they certainly were to a great extent in his city convent—he preserved at least a show of devotion at Grandmontans ; to which place he often threatened to retire, when mirth was pitched at too high a key in the Parisian convent.

Behold, then, the monarch and his peers seated around the table, their evening prayers already murmured, their supper nearly over, the brethren conversing with each other in a low tone, and if perchance an expression not strictly monastic escaped their lips, it certainly was not reverberated by the holy roof under which they sat.

Chicot, the jester, a great favourite with every one, was admitted at all hours, but would never take his meals in the convent, and for two reasons; the fare was very poor, and each one had to provide for himself. True nobility often voluntarily subjects itself to deprivation; the *bourgeoisie*, and the ranks still lower in the scale of society, always complain of the hardship, and rarely submit to it but perforce.

"Our recreant Brother Chicot," said the king,—it was a rule to call every one, admitted within the interior of the convent, Brother,—“would rather ride three miles than partake of our supper.”

“Yes,” exclaimed Brother Jean, the handsomest monk of the company, and who elsewhere ranked as the Duke D’Espéron; “yet Brother Robert defends his conduct.”

“Only,” replied Brother Robert, Duke of Bouillon, who was a noted epicure, and showed the effects of his taste in his pursy figure, “if his constitution be like mine, I always feel more contented and happy, nay, easier in my conscience, when I have eaten satisfactorily, than while in a state of desire. In the former situation there is no disagreeable sensation disturbing devotion; but—”

Here the speaker was interrupted by a loud knocking at the outer door.

Seeing D’Espéron about to rise, Bouillon anticipated him, exclaiming satirically, “Let me be porter, as I have had nothing to disturb my digestion?”

Bouillon, who was a penitent merely through fashion, disliked the regulations exceedingly, and was not scrupulous of disguising this feeling, hastened to the door, where our traveller was waiting admittance. He had dismounted, and stood just within the porch when the figure of Bouillon presented itself to his sight. He was too much lost in astonishment at the incongruity of costume with the noble air of the duke, to declare immediately the object of his visit; and the dissatisfied epicure, supposing that he was a messenger with letters from Paris, cried impatiently, “Give me the letters and begone.”

“Begone!” thought the traveller to himself, “this will never do for a weary traveller: I must explain.” In words and gestures as respectful as he could assume—though it was a hard matter to refrain from smiling as his eye glanced from one part of the monk’s dress to another—he informed him that he craved food and lodging, from the well known hospitality of the convent.

Bouillon caught up the latter words with avidity; he thought

the young man was sent by some of their friends as a practical satire on the scanty fare of the convent; and he resolved the joke should have full play. The traveller, whose mirth was pent up like a swollen river, seeing the monk made no offer to conduct him in, but stood smiling under the porch, attempted to ask for the superior, but could only utter, "I wish to see the h-o-ly Brother Henry,"—and burst out into an immoderate fit of laughter, in which Bouillon, whose suspicions were now confirmed, heartily joined. He soon led the way to the refectory.

"Be serious," whispered the duke, before they entered the room; "this mirth will not suit our superior!"

The monk then told him to wait while he announced the object of his visit. This performed, the traveller was ushered into the penitential presence. He advanced with a bold careless mien, prepared for amusement; but when he had looked around upon the assembly, so impressed was he with the noble deportment of the brethren, who seemed to his fancy to betray the air of soldiers and gentlemen—in not one could he recognise the drooping head and often cunning expression of a monk—that his demeanour changed to the most respectful address.

There was at that time, he knew, a great stir among the clergy to revive a religious zeal among their flocks, to counteract the progress of the reformed religion: "Possibly," surmised he, "this is the fruit of their trouble—these are young men who have voluntarily deprived themselves of the pleasures of the world, urged to the sacrifice by the zeal of the Catholic preachers."

In accordance with the rules of the fraternity, which were based on humility and equality, the traveller was invited to seat himself near the superior, while the remainder of the simple fare, of which they had just partaken, was set before him. Had he been in the company of vulgar-looking monks, such as he had anticipated supping with, and towards whom the course of his education had taught him other feelings than that of reverence, he would have fallen in with Chicot's advice, and asked for more delicate viands; but he was awed by the noble air of the company, and above all, by the dignified and graceful bearing of the superior.

This quiet behaviour was quite contrary to the wishes of Bouillon, who, while he waited upon the stranger, looked at him several times with great earnestness, as a hint to put in practice the instructions which he believed him charged with.

Attributing his silence, however, to deference and fear, he resolved to begin the attack himself.

"Let us hear the news from Paris," said the duke; "men of your class gossip on every subject—what were your neighbours talking about this evening—what do they say of us and our institution?"

The traveller, who had been diverted with the folly of the brethren wearing jewels in a convent, and being, likewise, unaware that their seclusion from society was only occasional, had come to the conclusion that a short period would see them back again in the busy world quite tired of their religious adventure. Accepting, therefore, the challenge of the duke, and without denying that he had come from Paris, he replied—

"They say that your half-system of devotion will not last six months longer!"

"Then they do talk about us," rejoined the other;—"and how would they have us perfect our system?"

"Shaven heads!" answered the traveller, "is your only remedy. It would prevent a worldly relapse."

While this colloquy was carried on, his majesty had accidentally caught a glance of Chicot's ring on the finger of the stranger. He was immediately struck with surprise, which was increased when he heard from the traveller that he came from Paris, as he knew his jester had taken the contrary road. A suspicion of his guest's honesty immediately crossed his mind, and in alarm for the safety of Chicot, he asked the traveller who gave him the ring he wore.

"It is the gift of a fool," answered the stranger, carelessly, "whom I met with on the road."

The brow of his majesty lowered with displeasure, and he repeated angrily, "Fool as he may be—he would never willingly have given you that jewel. Look! brethren;—is not that the ring I gave to Chicot; and which he promised to hold as safely as his head?"

The young man did not attempt to conceal his gift from the gaze of the brethren; though he was inwardly chagrined at the circumstance. But it did not rest here. The superior inquired if the meeting occurred between the convent and Paris.

The traveller was dumb—he saw his error in having acquiesced in the supposition of his coming from Paris. How suspicious would it now appear, threatened as he was with a charge he disdained, to avow the contrary direction of his route! He had been lately traversing the southern provinces, and there were concealed about his person letters from many

of the most influential nobles. It was for the safety of these documents that he felt alarm: while the paleness which overspread his face confirmed the suspicions of the superior and his brethren. Brother Jean, who perceived that his majesty interpreted the stranger's silence and consternation into proofs of criminal possession of the jewel, and expecting his majesty might give way to grief for what would prove only an imaginary loss, resolved to clear up the matter, and at once asked the stranger what road he had travelled by. The guest described his route. So far he answered readily: but when he was questioned with respect to his rank, replied haughtily, that it ill became their hospitality thus to treat him beneath their roof: that his journey was performed under a religious vow of secrecy, and he would not, without the sanction of the head of the Church, divulge his name.

"He has killed my poor Chicot!" exclaimed the king, in a mournful voice, while his head sank on his breast. All the brethren started up.

The traveller, in alarm for the secrets of others besides his own, saw in prospective a noble enterprise about to be rendered abortive through his own folly and the impertinence of a jester; and these thoughts crowding his mind, he was, for an instant, nearly overpowered. But rage mingled with his despair to find himself so unwittingly enthralled; he cursed his own imprudent mad humour—darting upon his accusers a look of such indignation, that many were impressed with a conviction of his innocence. But to their inquiries, he only replied contemptuously—"Send for the jester!"

In this extremity, not knowing what to do, and dreading lest they should attempt to search him, as he had not imbecile monks to contend with, he resolved to extricate himself by a rapid movement. Muttering invectives against their inhospitality, he signified his intention of quitting their society; but disdaining that his retreat should assume the appearance of an escape, he walked quietly towards the door of the refectory, inwardly vowing, that if he could but reach the post by the porch, where his horse was still tied, he would never have communion again with any who wore parti-coloured hose. But the Duke of Bouillon threw his portly figure between the door and his guest, who instantly drawing his sword, demanded by what authority he was detained.

"The highest authority in France!" replied the duke, pointing to the superior.

The traveller was confounded—a crowd of thoughts rushed

across his mind ; he remembered some reports he had heard in the south of the king's religious fantasies. Turning towards the superior, he let fall the point of his weapon on the floor, and bowing his knee, exclaimed, "I am your majesty's prisoner !"

In a few words he briefly recapitulated his interview with Chicot, and the exchange of rings, and concluded by protesting that he was ready to offer his life for the safety of the jester.

"It is an improbable tale," exclaimed D'Espernon, "and wants the grace of an honest name to stamp its truth."

But the traveller was firm : he resolved that the consequences of his folly should not fall upon others, and he answered in a tone almost satirical, probably from the contempt he felt for the deception.

"Till my vow is performed, my name is in the keeping of his holiness."

"And till Chicot makes his re-appearance," replied D'Espernon, "your body shall be in the safe keeping of Le Clerc."

The traveller started ; it was the name of the governor of the Bastile. During this colloquy, his majesty was still buried in grief for the uncertain fate of his favourite ; his nature was so susceptible, that the misfortunes of his friends and favourites were as his own ; their death affected him more than the loss of a kingdom. His very life became their prey : he heaped his riches upon them while living, and when dead his heart became their tomb. D'Espernon, who held the first place in his affection, now whispered his majesty to know what they should do with the stranger. His fate was soon decided. The duke informed him, that his majesty had resolved in his clemency, and through a possibility of his innocence, that he should not be sent to the Bastile, but immediately marched to the guard-room of the Louvre, there to be held prisoner till Chicot appeared, and as the king intended to return to his palace early on the morrow, if the jester came back to the convent before that time, his imprisonment could not be of long duration ; but if Chicot did not appear, he would be consigned to the dreaded Parisian fortress.

"The Louvre !" exclaimed the traveller to himself—"the very destination of my journey ! It would have been almost worth my while to have sent the soul of the jester wandering to gain admittance there ! But the guard-room !—It matters not—there can only be a flight of stairs between it and the realization of my hopes."

To have escaped a dungeon in the Bastile, threatened by

Brother Jean, was a pleasant retrospect ; but our young traveller could scarcely dissemble his joy at the proposed alternative of the Louvre, to gain admittance into which, and safely deliver the letters concealed on the person, had been the principal object of his journey to the capital. He readily surrendered his sword to Bouillon, protesting against his harsh imprisonment, but at the same time declaring his innocence of any crime, and his confidence in the return of the jester.

Thus ended the interview. Bouillon and several of the brethren escorted the traveller to Vincennes, which they soon reached. The night was light enough for the young man to perceive that it was a small place which had probably grown up as a necessary appendage to the magnificent feudal castle, whose dark outline he distinctly traced on the left hand as he entered the village street. The duke stopped at the door of the inn, and summoning the host, desired him to repair immediately to the castle, and present an order which he gave him for two of the Swiss guard to come prepared to conduct a prisoner to Paris. Our host did not at all relish the task : he represented to Bouillon that it would be two hours before he could bring the men ; that the bridge was drawn up—the portcullis lowered—the governor probably in bed, and not to be disturbed ; but that, fortunately, there were several of the guard still in his house, and that monseigneur had better avail himself of their services.

This was true enough, though contrary to discipline. It was the custom for a few of the Swiss to stay at the inn all night to carouse ; they took the privilege by rotation—the muster sergeants, who shared the pleasure, conniving at the license. When the host went in and informed his military customers that certain gentlemen of the king's train required two of them to march instantly to Paris, all the four took alarm ; and while a pair, the soberest of the quartette, snatched up their halberds and marched out at the front door, the other two escaped by another way.

Bouillon and his friends were so much pleased in finding the men thus easily, that they forbore inquiring strictly into the cause of their staying at the inn. The order was given up to the Swiss, with a request that they would present it to the Marshal De Biron, who would relieve them of their charge.

No sooner had the brethren seen the prisoner marched off quietly between the sentinels, than all returned to the convent, save Bouillon, who escaped from the party, and running back to the inn, staid there a full hour and a half. What occupa-

tion he was engaged in during his stay, no memoir of the age divulges; and it would ill become us to substitute conjecture in absence of certainty.

CHAPTER V.

——— I must have liberty
Withal, as large a charter as the wind,
To blow on whom I please; for so fools have:
And they that are most galled with my folly,
They most must laugh.

As You Like It.

BEFORE the Duke of Bouillon had returned to his friends at Grandmontans, and in the midst of their doubts and the grief of the superior, who sat, incapable of receiving comfort, while the fate of his beloved Chicot was yet dubious, the jester, who carried a key to admit him when the brethren might be engaged in prayer, entered the refectory, looking earnestly around for the traveller.

The joy of the king was unbounded: he sprang up from his chair at the sound of Chicot's voice, and rushed forward to meet him. No lady could have displayed more pleasure at the recovery of her lost spaniel, than did the monarch of France on beholding the broad visage of his fool.

Chicot was unconscious of what this fondness meant: his eye wandered to every corner of the chamber, regardless of his majesty's inquiries.

"Where is the ring I gave you, Chicot?" said Henry, taking hold of the jester's ear.

"Where is the wonderful traveller I sent you, Brother Henry?" retorted Chicot.

"The young man, do you mean, Chicot," asked the king, "one who wore your ring on his finger?"

"That very same half-prodigy—where is he?" exclaimed the jester.

"Where?" cried the monarch, giving way to mirth, in which all the brethren joined,—"where! Why, if he have not overmastered his guards, he must be, by this time, safe in the guard-room of the Louvre, charged with the murder of yourself."

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Chicot, muttering to himself as he

walked away in displeasure from the king, "I have flung Castilian chestnuts to Flemish swine!"

At the end of the chamber, beneath the window, was a square dais of a single step, from which the superior was accustomed to read homilies to the fraternity. When the jester had gained this spot, having walked there without any premeditation, he suddenly turned round, and addressed a reproof to his majesty in the true ecclesiastical tone of censure.

"Brother Henry! Brother Henry! look well at this cap!" exclaimed he, holding forth his own,—“and you, peers and princes of France, read out of the same book! This cap, which for your own benefit I have condescended to elevate above my stature, is the emblem of folly! not of mine; for the rod of the schoolmaster, though a sign of disgrace, is none to himself. When the thunder-storm rages above the valleys of Dauphiny, the peaked mountain attracts the fiery danger—defies its utmost wrath—and thus the valleys escape the desolation threatened.

"This," continued the jester, holding his conical cap by the apex, "is your true peaked mountain of Dauphiny! It has preserved you from many a folly! I have been the scape-goat, and saved the flock from harm! Nor do I claim more merit than any brother of my profession! Do I not ever stand a living beacon before your eyes—has not the lolling of this ornament diverted you from many a foolish purpose? Brother Henry! you deserve to wear it! Had I the power, you should address the next assembly of the states in it! You have cast into captivity the wonder of the age! That young man is worth the richest province! I knew it the moment I cast my eyes upon him: I read it in the lines of the face—the glorious curve of the mouth, so delicate, yet so pregnant with humour. I sent him to you, a rich present, worth a hundred thousand rings—and you, brother, treat him like dirt! By all the collected wisdom of Europe, it is enough to make me fling away the court, and turn hermit!"

So saying, the indignant son of Momus descended from the dais, and casting a look of ineffable contempt upon his audience, strode out of the room.

The next morning's sun saw issue from the castle of Vincennes, whither they had repaired from the convent, a gallant train of gentlemen apparelled in the gay costume of the sixteenth century. Silk and velvet vied with the more concentrated lustre of jewels and precious stones. The noble brotherhood of Penitents had put aside their woollen

robes ; and with their more natural and becoming dress, had re-assumed the gay manners of the French court. D'Esperson congratulated the stately De Joyeuse upon their return to the Louvre and the smiles of its beauties ; while De Joyeuse whispered to the stout Duke of Bouillon, that he envied him the feelings with which he would greet the viands on the well-spread table of the queen-mother ; that the forthcoming night would not bring with it the necessity of escorting a chance prisoner to his dungeon to enable monseigneur to indulge in the luxury of a supper ! Bouillon said to himself, that the next best thing to the pleasures of the table was the society of a man of wit, and resolved to cultivate the acquaintance of the traveller, if he should prove a gentleman in spite of his ordinary apparel and poverty of equipage. The other penitents, devoted to their monarch in his fantasies, and to whom the temporary seclusion from the world had given a greater relish for its pursuits, which may perhaps account for the mingled hypocrisy, devotion, and licentiousness of their corps, crowded behind his majesty as he rode onward to the Porte St. Antoine. D'Esperson was on the right hand of royalty, and De Joyeuse on the left ; while Chicot, lively and airy in his movements, yet grave in his features, rode his mare Trista Verita in front of the cortège, ever and anon throwing his leg over his mare's head, sitting sideways, and bowing at intervals to his noble friends. He had the faculty of imitating the gait, bearing, and gesture of every being he encountered ; and as the market-women were returning in great numbers from the city, his talent was in constant requisition, to the great amusement of the royal party. Braying in the ears of the poor beasts that were carrying home their fair and buxom loads, to the great terror of the devotees of Pomona ; pretending to fall off his steed, his large face dropping close to the eyes of a brown damsel, as though the man in the moon had tumbled into this world ; making his Trista Verita dance like forked lightning about the road, to the infinite dismay of the poor travellers, who knew not which side to take : these, and similar diversions, formed the pastime of their short ride. The high-born Valois laughed at his jester's pranks, and the terror of his poor subjects, till the tears ran down his cheeks, which gave occasion for the courtiers to whisper among themselves that he shed tears for the distresses of his people. But Henry was not a selfish prince : the same key which opened the gates of mirth displayed also his generosity ; and from a purse which he always in public wore at his side for the purpose of charity, he

distributed a recompense for his ridicule. Who would have imagined the existence of the earthquakes of contention which threatened France from the gay demeanour of its monarch ! Yet it is more than probable such an idea entered the mind of Valois himself, perhaps from beholding the gate of the city which contained his great enemy ; for as they approached *Porte St. Antoine*, the king, turning to *D'Espéron*, said—

“That *Chicot* will kill me, if *Cousin Guise* do not !”

When the cavalcade entered the court of the palace, the king, flinging himself from his horse, and calling out to the jester to follow, rushed into the hall. *De Biron* was ready to receive him. But forgetting to make inquiries respecting his illustrious mother, and regardless of the governor's congratulations on his return, his majesty's whole thoughts were intent on his captive.—

“Where is the prisoner you received last night, marshal ?”

The marshal, who had retired to rest previous to the arrival of the two Swiss, and whose dignity would have been compromised by rising to receive a prisoner of no note, knew nothing of the matter, and referred his majesty to *Colonel Grillon*.

Grillon, on being appealed to, replied that he also had retired to rest before the prisoner was admitted ; but that the captain of the guard would render an account of the charge, and that officer was accordingly sent for.

The captain assured his majesty that the young man still remained in the custody of the Swiss in a strong-room on a level with the guard-room. In conformity with the discipline established by the governor, he had taken his turn to mount guard during the night ; and that, while engaged in the performance of this duty, the two men with their prisoner were ushered into his presence. He was desirous of relieving them of their charge, but they refused to deliver him up to any one but the *Marshal de Biron*, alleging the verbal instructions of the *Duke de Bouillon*, backed by the order of the king.

As the Swiss persisted in their obstinate resolution, and the captain was equally determined that the governor should not be disturbed so unnecessarily, he commanded them to repair to the strong-room with their prisoner, and await there the marshal's hour of rising. As the men belonged to the *Vincennes* battalion, he did not order them under arrest, though fully determined that they should be effectually punished by a long watch.

“It is very strange then, monsieur,” exclaimed *Valois*, “that

they have not presented themselves before De Biron. But as the young man is innocent, and has suffered an unjust punishment through my haste, I will liberate him myself?"

The captain led the way, followed by Grillon, his majesty, and the jester. The door was found locked, with the key outside.

"This accounts for their absence," said Valois, smiling; "monsieur has taken especial good care of the guards as well as the prisoner!"

But the officer of the night-watch knew that he had taken no such precaution; and it was not without a secret misgiving that he opened the door for his majesty. There was no prisoner to be seen; and the two guards were found fast asleep, with their heads resting on the table.

"How is this, colonel?" exclaimed Valois, "I thought the Swiss never slept on their post?"

"They have been long absent from my control, sire," replied Grillon, bluntly, "and have lost their morality elsewhere."

"Did I not tell your majesty," cried Chicot, "that the traveller was a clever man?"

Poor Grillon was much concerned for the honour of the regiment, and exclaimed bitterly against the governor of Vincennes, who, he affirmed, must have corrupted the morals of his men. Such a miracle, as a Swiss-guard sleeping on his post, had never been heard of before.

"It cannot be helped, colonel!" said Valois, jocosely, "the air of Vincennes is not favourable to discipline, and the Duke de Bouillon detests it."

Grillon, however, notwithstanding the mildness of his sovereign, could not brook the shame of the discovery, and secretly made up his mind to challenge the governor.

While the captain and his superior officer were arousing the sentinels from their lethargy, Valois and the jester, who were both intent on the recovery of the stranger,—the monarch, through the marvellous account furnished by Chicot of his abilities, though these had been taken on trust,—and the fool, through a strong desire which possessed him of sharing his histrionic and mimetic honours with a brother mimic, in order that the pair, united, might be strong enough to make head against certain enemies of Chicot, who threatened the extinction of his sway in the palace,—left the scene of Grillon's discomfiture.

By the persuasion of the jester, Valois ordered a strict search to be made after the prisoner. Orders were forwarded

to the commander of the city garrison, and also to the municipal authorities, that no one should be suffered to pass the barriers whose appearance at all corresponded with the description furnished of the traveller. Paris was in a state of siege. The Guissards took the alarm, and there was a sudden meeting of the chiefs at the Hotel de Guise ; while the citizens, who were mostly in favour of the duke, began shutting up their houses, to prepare for the expected contest. Monsieur Chicot, the mainspring of the movement, felt himself a greater man than the Duke D'Espernon.

But where was our young traveller the while ?

When Bouillon left him with the Swiss, he was not slow in perceiving their inebriation ; but as his cue lay not in escape, he allowed himself to be conducted to the Louvre without putting the strength and activity of his guards to the test, whom exercise gradually brought round to a state approaching sobriety.

In the guard-room, while listening to the dispute between the captain and his escort, whom the potations absorbed at the inn of Vincennes had rendered more bold than became good discipline, the idea struck him, that short as might be his stay at the palace, a stolen interview was yet possible to be effected with the captive King of Navarre, and the letters which he bore, addressed to that monarch, safely surrendered to his care.

He had been made aware, ere he started on his perilous journey, of the jealousy which shut up all access to the Bourbon prince, save to the inmates of the palace ; and to have craved an audience of the monarch, during his stay at Paris, even though he were disguised as a merchant, or one of humbler rank, he was certain would have exposed him to the *surveillance* of the police, and perhaps to ultimate discovery, without having even effected his object.

But when he found himself conducted to the strong-room ; the door locked, and the key removed by the cautious Helvetians—an interview with the illustrious captive, with the realization of which he had been flattering his imagination, faded into a remote possibility, especially as it was to be expected that on the arrival of Valois at an early hour in the morning and in all probability, accompanied by the supposed murdered man, he would be set at liberty, and dismissed the precincts of the palace.

Still hope did not desert him, and dissimulation came to his aid, a welcome guest. The chamber, which was principally used as a temporary prison for the confinement of refractory or disobedient troops, was but scantily furnished ; a roughly-fashioned

table, a few chairs equally cumbersome, and a solitary lamp, were its only ornaments or necessities.

Scarcely replying to the occasional remarks of the Swiss, he sat down in one of the large chairs, and with half-closed, though waking, eyes, watched the motions of the sentinels. In other moods their picturesque costume and noble stature would have pleased his fancy. The doublet was of striped silk, blue and white, brushed by a long shaggy beard, which fell almost to the waist. However inconvenient this fashion might prove in the field of battle, yet the appearance of the men was singularly imposing when seen grouped around the entrance of the royal tent, their beards shaking with their chins, or waving in the breeze ; while the tall formidable halberd, held at arm's length, or drooping against the shoulder, rendered their appearance worthy of the train of royalty.

This was not, however, the aspect in which they were beheld by the prisoner ; he took but little heed of any other quality than their apparent strength ; but he beheld with joy the increasing drowsiness which they could not shake off, and in his heart he blessed the good beverage of mine host at Vincennes.

The unexpected summons to appear before the Duke de Bouillon—the exercise of walking—and the dispute with the captain of the guard, had all tended to dissipate the effects of the hard drinking they had indulged in ; but the vinous deity was, however, determined to prove conqueror, and its victims being now deprived of every active stimulant, were entirely at his mercy.

One dropped off quietly to sleep ; but the other, the possessor of the key, was resolute in making a stand against the drowsy influence which oppressed his nerves ; he arose from his seat—walked up and down the dimly-lit room—and at last approached the traveller, and having satisfied himself that he was fast asleep, returned to his own seat, and speedily fell a prey to his powerful enemy.

For awhile the traveller watched, with glimmering half-shut eyes, the sleeping sentinel, nor was his mind less active in studying the chances of escape, but to no purpose ; the Swiss slept uneasily, and the one who had made the greatest resistance, still continued the unequal warfare against the leaden-eyed deity, and ever and anon, as a wounded warrior crushed beneath the panoply of his foe, struggled and was still again.

Once, to the alarm of the young diplomatist, who had been preparing for a coup-de-main, and had arisen from his chair to

put the somnolency of the Swiss to the proof—the robust Helvetian burst his fetters, and sprung to his feet, scarcely allowing time for the prisoner to re-assume his seat, and again feign sleep.

“*Sacre !*” exclaimed the long-bearded guardsman, “that Lucernese captain is an enemy to the regiment ! I wish it were day.”

After a pause, he muttered, while looking attentively at the traveller, “How soundly he sleeps ! I should like to know what mistake he has made at the convent ;—knocked a hare on the scull may be—but he’ll find out to his cost, that he had better have trounced a city-provost than meddled with the four-footed vermin of our pious master. I was very near being caught myself once.”

But the noble effort of the Swiss to keep himself awake, ended only in a single discomfiture ; he re-seated himself—his eyelids drooped even beneath the dull lamp above—and presently his head sunk on the table.

“*Voilà !*” said the prisoner to himself, who had been watching his motions, “my old master, Beza, would have called that interval of consciousness an epitome of human life ;—a sudden start into existence—a rubbing of the eyes—a momentary brightness—sight dim again—and a sleep like death till awoke into eternity.”

At length the obstinate sentinel joined chorus with his comrade ; Bacchus and his shadow, the drowsy Somnus, who throws his dark pall over every banquet, prevailed. Now was the hour of triumph for the prisoner. He approached the Helvetian, and with a firm skilful hand, which would not have disgraced the handicraft of a more modern era, drew the iron key from the sash of the sleeper without disturbing him. Stealthily he crossed the chamber—put the key gently in the lock—it resisted his mild effort—it grated audibly as he applied more force—he cast an anxious glance at the Swiss, but they were both quiet—gradually he accomplished the evolution through the wards, and the bolt shot back with a slight crash.

Fortunately Somnus stood his friend—the Helvetian showed no signs of consciousness—and he withdrew the key from the lock. He ventured to open the door ; all was quiet in the palace, as it was yet dark ; and after a moment’s reflection, he judged it most prudent to remain where he was till the break of day.

For this consummation of his wishes, he waited quietly till the dawn threatened at last to pale the ineffectual light of the

feeble lamp ; and what was an event to be dreaded,—awake the sentinels. But fortune, who had frowned but yesterday, was now disposed to smile. He escaped from the chamber without discovery, and turned the key upon his leaden-eyed guards.

As it was the custom for the noblesse, as well as the inferior classes of the sixteenth century, to be stirring—nay, even engaged in important business—at the earliest hours, our young diplomatist indulged a reasonable hope of finding the King of Navarre awake, and capable of receiving the precious documents which he bore ;—but in what quarter of the palace was he domiciled ?

"*N'importe*," muttered the traveller ; "I will ask the first person I meet—no one knows my face but the splenetic captain."

Wandering on, he came to the foot of the grand staircase, and was hesitating whether he should ascend or not, when he beheld an elderly gentleman at the remote end of the gallery, talking to a page. As his aspect indicated the reverse of a propitious reply to the inquiries of one in the traveller's equivocal situation, the latter escaped up the stairs in an instant, but only, as he presently believed, to incur as much danger as in the gallery beneath.

For, in the corridor above, the Duke d'Alençon was walking to and fro like a man distracted. He had ventured on play—at a game he was not skilled in—the night previous, and lost a sum of money which had been set apart for his German allies. The duke was heaping upon himself every species of invective, and every ugly epithet he could remember, when the stranger intruded on his path. They confronted each other.

"Direct me, monseigneur," said the young man, screwing up his courage to the occasion, "to the chamber of his majesty, the King of Navarre."

"Never heed Navarre," replied D'Alençon, who was too much out of temper to notice the stranger particularly, but from his question, believed him to be some one just arrived from the provinces ;—"try your skill against mine in the tennis-court, your society will give me relief—for I am so disturbed that I know not whether to fly, leap, or jump."

"Tennis is not the remedy for such a disease," replied the traveller, much struck with the oddity of the prince.

"What do you propose, then ?" rejoined D'Alençon, sharply.

"Action more abrupt," answered the stranger, "and which

also will affect your mind sensibly. Are those stones of value which glitter in your cap ?”

“The costliest !” replied the prince, in his turn surprised at the manner of the stranger.

“Then look hither, monseigneur,” said the traveller, approaching the window, “throw the cap out—a present to your sentinel ;—and if the loss do not bring you fully to your senses, I am no physician ! And now for my fee : tell me where I may find his Majesty of Navarre !”

D’Alençon was all amazement ; he quite forgot his loss. But whether he would have satisfied the inquiry of the eccentric physician we cannot say, for on hearing a well-known step, he was in a hurry to depart ; and to the entreaties of the stranger only replied—after looking over the balustrade, and pointing to a matronly lady in black—by saying, “That elderly personage can answer your inquiries better than I :” upon which he made off with the quickest speed.

The elderly personage alluded to, after ascending several stairs, changed her mind, and continued along the gallery beneath. The traveller rushed down after her. Her dress was very plain, and she seemed just the description of person to afford him every information. Before he overtook the lady, her hand was on the lock of a door. Afraid of losing the opportunity, he cried, “Madame,” taking off his cap, and bowing as he approached. But she only cast on him a look of surprise, and immediately disappeared within, shutting the door after her. “Parisian courtesy,” muttered the young man in a rage : but hearing another footstep behind, he turned round, and saw the lame gentleman again ; who, having witnessed the encounter, was approaching to know the cause of his having accosted the lady in black.

“May the saints protect me from that old man !” exclaimed the traveller ; “his eye is upon me—I do not at all like him. Thank Heaven for having lamed him—he cannot walk fast without losing his dignity.”

Escaping rapidly from the palace by a side-door, our young diplomatist found himself in a path leading to the gardens of the Tuileries, recently planned and laid out under the direction of Catherine. Without knowing what to do at the moment, he entered the gardens, chafed into a fury in being thus baffled of his object, yet too suspicious of the keen-eyed old gentleman to throw himself willingly in his path.

The gardens are, as all our readers know, magnificent, though altered in some measure from their original character.

But the adventurous youth, who was now gliding along their alleys, and across the parterres, was too much excited to care for the splendour which environed him. His alarm was increased by observing sentinels at various stations, who had been placed there by the command of De Biron, to have an eye upon the King of Navarre when his captive majesty took the air.

The late contact with the Swiss had made them disagreeable to his sight, and he struck into an unfrequented path; but behold! another sentinel in front of the temple which faced the walk. Cursing the Swiss and their long beards, which seemed to move suspiciously at the intruder, he cut across the path, and entered a plantation; but his course was soon impeded by a thick growth of underwood, which seemingly surrounded some temple or grotto. He continued to skirt the shrubbery for an opening, which at length displayed itself to his quick eyes—though the inlet might have escaped observation to one less curious than the traveller. The foliage was clipped so as to form a narrow winding path, which led into a circular space about thirty or forty yards in diameter, entirely surrounded by trees and shrubs. Once within, there appeared neither egress nor ingress, except to winged visitants. In the middle was a round basin, edged with stone, and in width sufficient to leave a wide walk around between the margin and the trees; in the centre, a fountain, fashioned into a bird, emitted a thin stream of water from its bill.

A long bench, or garden seat, with a high back, curiously carved, was the only furniture of the retreat; it was placed close to the shrubbery. Here the traveller seated himself, to recover from his alarm. Both fatigued and hungry, he felt grateful for the security of his present concealment; but, alas! this was soon destined to be disturbed—though fortunately, before sleep had overcome his weary limbs, harassed with the night's watch and the previous day's journey.

The seat was immediately opposite the entrance, and he fancied he heard a noise in that direction, which was soon confirmed palpably to his senses. To be found in a place where he had neither business nor privilege to enter, was running into useless danger, from which he was extremely anxious to preserve himself till he had seen the King of Navarre. There was no mode of escape but by forcing a passage through the underwood: this he attempted, but could not accomplish before the entry of the visitors. It was now too late—as the rustling of the boughs, among which he was awkwardly en-

thrall'd, would have exposed him to detection. There was no resource but to wait patiently in his leafy retreat, without stirring either hand or foot.

The unconscious disturbers of the traveller's repose were a lady and gentleman, both past the period of their youth. The lady was no other than the matron in sable, who had eluded the young man's inquiries. Her companion was a man advanced in years, with passionless but intelligent features, expressive only of care and anxiety; his dress plain and unostentatious, but of rich texture, and arranged with neatness; and his whole appearance might have led the beholder to suppose him a counsellor of state or president of parliament. He preceded the lady, carefully removing the leafy spray, which stretched across the opening of the path—and bowing to his mistress with an air of antique gallantry that was irresistibly ludicrous even to our weary traveller, they walked side by side round the margin of the basin.

"Well," thought the young man, "I shall have an insight into the intrigues of the palace full early! So madame was too intent on other matters to attend to me!"

After walking round the basin several times, the while engaged in earnest talk, the lady sat down on the bench, motioning the old gentleman to take a place by her side, which he did with the utmost deference, as though it were too great a favour.

"A fine old courtier!" thought the caged diplomatist; "he never loses sight of good-breeding in the height of his felicity!"

"Villeroi! you are but a fool!" exclaimed the lady, "or even worse!"

"Ah! my ancient gentleman," murmured the traveller; "you must display a little more warmth and less politeness."

The old man bowed to madame's reproof. Her majesty—our reader may have recognised her ere this—continued:—

"My respect for our holy religion is at least equal to your's—though my love for the rebellious Guise far less. Under pretence of supporting the Catholic faith with a zealous heart and a high hand, you league yourself with our great enemy! Have I not done as much for our faith as Guise?"

"Your majesty," answered Villeroi, "has been the chosen instrument of Heaven."

"Only to bereave me," mentally exclaimed the young man, surprised exceedingly at the quality of the lady, "of a dear

relative—Navarre of a mother—and how many of the best blood in the kingdom, of fathers, brothers, and kindred !”

“Yes, monseigneur !” cried Catherine, a little softened by the compliment, “and the harvest is again ripe for our sickle.”

“Then why does not your majesty set the reapers to work ?” asked her secretary Villeroi, with whom she had been of late displeased for his increasing familiarity with the Duke of Guise, and his readiness to fall into the leaguer’s policy.

“Ay !” replied Catherine with a sneer, “and employ your friend the duke, who, when the harvest was garnered, would quarrel with his master !—not content with keeping the grain to himself, he would—but away with metaphor ! and hear me, secretary ! I have my eye upon you—do not oppose us—you have been, and are still, in our confidence, and therefore must continue in it ! If you cannot assist us, you must run with us—if you cannot help on the wheels of state, you must hold fast to the chariot ! No man that ever possesses our secrets shall tell them but to God. Guise is a member of our privy-council certainly, for peace sake. But by our Lady of Loretto, secretary, I fear the Duke of Guise ten times more than the Huguenots. We must play one against the other ; and if the heretics be weak, strengthen them. Our army shall *not* march against them ; and if Guise stir in the matter, by St. John—the pope—ay, the arch-fiend himself,” continued the enraged queen, chuckling with anger, “I will let loose the King of Navarre.”

The secretary, who dreaded the queen’s anger as the mariner the storms of Biscay, dropped on his knees, supplicating her patience. While she was regarding him with a look of contempt, her anger, not half subsided by his contrition, a slight crash was heard among the boughs close to the seat.

The young traveller, despite his fatigue, had listened to the conversation with the utmost attention, and, in his anxiety to hear, leaned over the foliage, which suddenly gave way to his pressure. His consternation may be imagined at the untoward incident as he felt himself unable to make resistance, even if Villeroi were to plunge his rapier into the thicket. The secretary started to his feet alarmed. Catherine, whose eye could not penetrate the enclosure in which the young man had enveloped himself, and who neither dreaded danger nor suspected a listener, imagined the noise had been occasioned by a bird scared from its perch. Villeroi was more dubious.

“Do not be alarmed,” cried her majesty, upon whom the

incident had an effect, fortunate for the secretary, in diverting her anger, "a magpie, perchance, or a blackbird, has learned our secrets, and flown away to the Hotel de Guise."

"Your majesty is gracious," said the listener to himself, somewhat relieved from his terror, though he dreaded the vicinity of the Swiss sentinels, who would have made short work with one in his condition.

Villeroi, who was an old, avaricious, plotting courtier, saw the change in her majesty's temper, and resolved to turn it to account, in getting out of the scrape into which he had fallen.

"Your majesty's courage," said the secretary, "makes your servant ashamed of his alarm. What chance have your enemies against her whom future historians will compare with Semiramis? That queen ruled by force of arms, but your majesty exercises a softer sway. You have brought Europe to your feet. How often have I been in ecstasy while beholding the rough English and German envoys, and the stately Spaniard, alike enthralled by the meshes of beauty which you throw around them."

Villeroi's tact awakened the vanity of Catherine, who was ever priding herself on the politic purposes to which she had applied the influence of her train of beauties: no subject pleased her better than an allusion to the skilful practices of her maids of honour over the ambassadors of foreign powers. She perceived the obvious flattery, yet relented upon the old secretary's appeal, and commanded him to be seated.

"Do not let the fervour of your zeal for our faith," continued the queen, "lead you into the practices of Guise."

"I am bound to your majesty's fortunes," cried Villeroi, "though my services are not so valuable as the Graces, which are ever ready to obey your behests."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Catherine, affecting contempt, "I have but continued the custom of our predecessor Anne, who introduced the fashion of a permanent residence at court of the fairest and noblest daughters of France."

"But to what superior purposes does your majesty apply their charms?" rejoined the wily secretary. "Anne was a Bretonese, and wanted companions. There was no Condé in Anne's time to transform the provincial beauties into seductive divinities."

Flattery is pleasing to the loftiest minds, who will receive the incense while contemning the ministrant: her majesty was silent, and Villeroi proceeded.

"Does not your majesty remember those poor Polish deputies who came to offer the throne to our illustrious Valois? How bewildered they were on beholding that celestial dance, in which all the goddesses of Olympus moved to the sound of unseen music, beneath a sky of azure tapestry? "Poor-creatures! they would have surrendered up their hopes of heaven as readily as their kingdom."

"Enough, Villeroi!" exclaimed Catherine: "we have business in hand to talk of."

"I was but thinking of the Archduke of Austria," replied the secretary, trying to catch a smile on the features of his mistress, "and how the pretty De L'Orme brought to us the entire contents of his capacious scull."

Catherine fairly laughed.

"Does your majesty," continued the sagacious minister, "remember old Anthony of Navarre?" This was Catherine's favourite reminiscence.

"Do you mean, Villeroi," cried she exultingly, "when his dear Jeanne was at Noyon, and he wrote to her that he was fighting in our company at the siege of Rouen?"

"Yes," said the secretary, pretending to choke with laughter, "and all the while he was himself besieged in the camp by Juno, Venus, and Urania." Both Villeroi and the queen laughed unrestrainedly.

"O! *mon Dieu!*" exclaimed a voice from behind, commencing intelligibly, but ending in a strain which made no unapt chorus to their own mirth.

It proceeded from the traveller, whom hunger had rendered reckless and feverish, though it is doubtful, had he been in his ordinary condition, whether his peculiar temperament could have been restrained by a sense of danger while witnessing this interview of Catherine and her secretary. But though the interruption was involuntary—a paroxysm which he could not resist—he was instantly alive to the fatal consequences of provoking the wrath of the queen-mother. To rush forward and throw himself on her mercy was like a hunter craving truce with a lioness; to remain where he then stood was to expose himself to the searching of Villeroi's rapier. But his ever-ready genius suggested a mode of extrication.

Catherine and her minister were on the sudden almost appalled by the unlooked-for accompaniment, but there was no longer any doubt from what species of being the noise proceeded. But while the queen, stung with rage, cried out that she was betrayed, and her secretary was drawing his weapon,

the traveller, taking off the ornamented ring, said to himself, "One good turn deserves another, Monsieur Chicot : your gift has nearly cost me my life. Let us see the effect this god-send will have on your own fortunes."

Away flew the jewel, and struck her majesty on the bosom. At the moment, she fancied herself wounded by the projectile ; but the costly pellet falling to the ground, she eagerly picked it up.

"Stay, Villeroi ! What is this ?" cried Catherine.

"His majesty's ring : I know it," replied the secretary, more at home in the elucidation of others' actions than prompt to action himself.

"Now, by all the Medicis," exclaimed the queen, in a suppressed but more ominous voice than she had directed against her secretary in reproof of his intimacy with Guise, "this insolence shall cost Chicot much. It is his ring. Is not the unbounded favour of my foolish son sufficient for his vanity, but he must pry into our secrets ?"

"He is escaping through the thicket," cried the secretary, who heard the crashing of the boughs.

"Let him go," rejoined the queen, "your warrant shall reach him, and the Bastile hold his ugly face nevertheless. Let us away."

CHAPTER VI.

——— Fortune's blows,
When most struck home, being gently warded, crave
A noble cunning.

Old Play.

THE movements of the stranger had not passed unobserved. De Biron had seen him accost the queen—the guards had witnessed his movements in the garden of the Tuileries—and it was certain that he must be somewhere about the palace. Chicot had made up his mind that the traveller should become attached to the court—he required his assistance—and by the influence which he exercised over the royal will, he had at his command every one to assist him in the search. Valois was, indeed, mad on the subject—for the jester dinned into his ears that he had slighted and spurned one who would be, next to the jester himself, the brightest ornament of his court.

De Biron, who in general cared little about the king's fancies—putting his trust on an abler head—was moved, by his majesty's entreaties, to search the Tuileries, as he knew the person of the stranger.

The governor, who was ranging the gardens with several of the Swiss, at last espied our traveller walking very dejectedly along one of the paths. He was too old a general to pounce at once upon his man, but sent the troops by a circuitous route, to surround and cut off his retreat on every side. Time being allowed for this operation, the marshal advanced to the charge; but the stranger had, in the mean time, seated himself on the pedestal of a statue, and did not move on De Biron's approach.

"Monsieur had better walk with me," said the polite general, addressing the young man; "you must be fatigued."

"With any one—and any where," replied the traveller, "for a breakfast; though I would rather have it on the spot."

"Quite contrary to our etiquette," rejoined the marshal, smiling; "though, if you desire it, I will ask the opinions of the almoner and the usher: but, I am afraid, both Amiot and Davila would coincide with me."

Our young traveller, whom privation had tamed, readily accompanied the marshal; asking, by the way, if the king were returned to Paris.

"Ay, and Chicot too!" replied De Biron; "your innocence is apparent—and his majesty is anxious to express his regret for your detention."

This was bad news for the young man, who was afraid that his adventure in the Louvre would terminate with a few kind words, and a lackey to usher him to the gates. He was silent.

"An adventure like yours, with a generous monarch," said De Biron, seeing that the stranger did not reply—"and he has already expressed himself graciously in speaking of you—may turn out to your advantage, if your condition merit it. Fortune is a goddess, who delights to hide herself behind the colossal statue of danger."

This hint was not lost upon the person to whom it was addressed. "If my condition merit it!" thought the stranger. "Yes—there lies the difficulty: I am here without a name—and my own, without doubt, would justify one less scrupulous than Catharine in providing me with a turret or a dungeon in the Bastile. Yet I ought to satisfy this old gentleman, as well as his majesty in that particular—I must have a name!"

The assumption of a name, in the days of which we are writing, was no easy matter. There was a marked distinction between the *bourgeoisie* and the gentry—a barrier almost insurmountable. The gentry were, with few exceptions, composed of the members of ancient families, whose names were well known at the court—and the utmost ramifications of their families recorded by the heralds. The principal means of increase of the noblesse and gentry was from the corps of the lawyers, who, upon rising into eminence, acquired a territorial name as a necessary title of gentility. But such origin was looked upon with suspicious eyes; *une famille de robe*, as the descendants of a bourgeois lawyer were called, was a name of contempt; *un ancien gentilhomme* would have disdained an alliance with it. Our readers will remember, that so late as the reign of the fifteenth Louis, Madame Du Barri, the mistress of the monarch—the concubinage was no disgrace—was married to a man, whose family was noble before A. D. 1400, that she might have some little respect at court. A gentle name was of real service to a man in those days; and was an actual credential of gentility.

Our young friend had to choose between pride and security; to avow himself a *bourgeois*, and meet the contempt with which the noblesse regarded that class, or assume the name of some family, and receive, perhaps, the pleasing intelligence, that he would meet with several of its members in the course of the day. In this dilemma, a lucky expedient suggested itself to his ready fancy, and he told the old warrior that nothing would give him greater pleasure than to attract his majesty's goodwill: that his family was noble, and of Sicilian origin; his father, Monsignor Villa Franca, had escaped from Palermo, to avoid the danger brought on himself by a fatal encounter with a neighbour, and reaching Marseilles in safety, settled there and married the daughter of a rich merchant, who traded to Palestine and the Greek islands. From this union sprung the narrator, who had made a vow on his father's death to forego the time-honoured name of his family till its fair fame were re-established in the land of its origin. "But," continued the artful diplomatist, whose invention had not been blighted by hunger, "I can use no disguise with his majesty, whom I hold as my liege and suzerain."

This tale was told with such adroitness—with all the candour and amiable spirit of youth—eager of display, yet modest in the manner—that the marshal immediately felt an interest in young Villa Franca—and advised him by no means

to go to Sicily where he was unknown ;—Villa Franca smiled inwardly at the truth of this intimation ;—but exchange his father's and grandfather's wealth for French land, and employ Montjoie the herald to record his pedigree in the college of arms at Paris. "We have numerous Italian derivations among our noblesse," continued De Biron ; "the present Duke of Nevers is an Italian, and married the co-heiress of Nevers ; the ancestor of my friend Count Mirabeau was a Riquetti of Florence ; the Baron—"

But the marshal was interrupted in his catalogue of reaching the gate of the palace, by the necessity of attending to the wants of his charge, who could not appear in his present state before the king. Food, new and more costly raiment, and several hours' rest, were absolutely essential to the well-being of the descendant of the Sicilian Villa Francas !

Valois was abstemious, devout, and superstitious, in his clerical condition ; in his palace he was refined in luxury, and fastidious in all that related to his person. We have shown in what his projected reformation of religion had ended ; in his endeavour to attach the nobility to his person, he was not more successful ; but the attempt gave birth to an order still illustrious in the knighthood of Europe.

When he abandoned his elective kingship of Poland, and fled from Warsaw, pursued by the indignant Poles, he took refuge in Venice, where a nobleman presented him with the collar of an order of the Holy Ghost, but little known in Europe, perhaps not beyond the city in which it originated. Henry kept the jewel for its beautiful and holy design, but without attaching any other interest to the gift.

When he found his throne a seat of thorns, and the rock on which his ancestors had firmly stood their ground, undermined by the Duke of Guise and the clergy, he solicited his mother to resume the power she had exercised in her regency.

Bitterly deploring the fatal consequences of her son's error in offending the ecclesiastics, she resolved to make a struggle to retain the affections of the noblesse. Penitential processions in sackcloth, and genuflexions before the shrine of St. Denis, had failed in blinding vulgar eyes, for this especial reason ; that they were not performed in concert with, and by the contrivance of, the clergy.

But these specifics for the populace, could not be expected to have any effect on the governors of provinces, and inheritors of the noble domains, and ancestral chivalry of France. Of these, some were direct enemies ; others doubtful ; while a

numerous class were holding aloof to profit by dissensions, which would allow them to oppress the neighbouring towns, and collect the taxes for private aggrandizement.

With this class, the highest in the kingdom, the only counterpoise to avarice is pride : and on the latter sentiment was grounded the idea of Catherine's attack. The ancient order of St. Michael had been, while the number of its knights was limited, an object of emulation with every noble not in possession of the distinction. But several causes, such as the great increase of its commanders, and the badge having been often conferred upon men of a rank too low to merit the honour, had contributed to lessen its importance, and cast it into a general disesteem with the higher rank of nobility. This circumstance deprived the king of his legitimate influence ; to restore which was the joint design of himself and the queen-mother.

It was resolved that a new order, military and religious, should be instituted by the king, who being the fountain of honour, could confer what would be ardently coveted by the proudest of his subjects. The Venetian symbol occurring to his majesty, the order of the Holy Ghost was decided on ; and the pope's sanction and patronage obtained. But that the numerous corps of St. Michael should not take umbrage at their eclipse, it was resolved, that the knights of the new order should be chosen from those of the other, who were to be alone eligible novitiates. This was well calculated to raise both fraternities in esteem, while, to give attraction and dignity to the superior creation, it was restricted to one hundred commanders, exclusive of the sovereign.

Imagine the delight of a royal Martinet in modelling and fashioning the costume and appendages of an order of knighthood ! To see the illustrious designer, after a night of brilliant fancies, descend to his levee of tailors, embroiderers, workers in gold and silver, jewellers and feather-makers ; or closeted with heralds, churchmen, and antiquaries ! Such had been the occupation of Valois ; and the result of his own and fellow-labourers' employments was a chamber full of robes, sceptres, mantles, caps with heron-plumes and caps featherless, novitiate costume and robes of installation. These had been neglected during the sojourn at the convent of Grandmontans, but on his return to the Louvre, he visited the paraphernalia with the delight of a child long absent from its playthings.

When Villa Franca was introduced to the presence of the monarch, he found him in this chamber, standing before a full-length mirror, arrayed from head to foot in the magnificent cos-

tume he had invented ; a little man with a twinkling eye, the very beau-ideal of an antiquary, was kneeling between the mirror and royalty. His majesty was dressed in a doublet and nether garment of cloth of silver, stockings of white silk, and shoes and sword-scabbard of the same colour. Over these, he wore a mantle of black velvet lined with orange-silk, interspersed with gold-embroidered tongues of fire, the symbol of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost ; and upon his shoulders a mantelet of green mohair ornamented with silver ; around his neck, a splendid gold chain, to which was appended the symbol of the order—a dove in the centre of golden radii. This finery was crowned with a cap of black velvet, over which waved a mass of white, intermixed with heron plumage.

Our young adventurer was received very graciously upon his being presented by Davila the usher. But Valois was too much occupied with himself to allude to the rencounter at the convent ; he had been engaged for a full half hour debating with the little man with the twinkling eye upon the propriety of the mantelet.

"You are come in good time, Villa Franca," said the king, "to decide between ourself and Amiot. He prefers an ermine mantelet, white and spotted, to the dark green which I now wear. We are at issue, and you shall decide !"

"The dark green is most appropriate in reference to the other colours," replied Villa Franca, curious to know all about the dress and its purposes.

"In reference to the other colours !" exclaimed the little man, darting an angry glance upward to the new corner, and assuming a posture as erect as his kneeling position would allow of ; "ermine, I say, is preferable for the sake of contrast. White upon black, monseigneur ! That is my argument !" Valois looked inquiringly towards the young traveller for an answer.

"When my eye is bold enough to look upon the illustrious monarch of France," cried Villa Franca, "I should desire it to rest upon his noble features—the garments are but the setting which serves as a foil to the gem ! White ! there is white enough ! The green is not too dazzling ; but chaste and becoming !"

Had some one come behind and tripped up the heels of the Majesty of France, little Amiot could not have been more scandalized than at the familiarity of the referee. He looked appalled. But Valois laughed heartily at the defeat of the almoner, and decided upon the green mohair.

At this juncture Davila re-entered with a letter which he

delivered to the king. It was from Chicot, and s follows :—

“SIRE,

“Evil has befallen your faithful counsellor. He was snatched up by two of the bearded Swiss, and hurried off without explanation to his present dreary abode. Come and liberate me !

“CHICOT.

“In the Bastile.

“Send word by the valet, who can run quicker than your majesty, whether our learned traveller be found.”

When the king read the letter, he turned pale with rage. He cared neither to inquire the cause nor the author of the proceeding ; but summoning Colonel Grillon, desired him to march to the Bastile, and bring back the jester. In the mean time, dashing off mantle and cap, to the consternation of the almoner, he threw himself into a chair, and would neither speak to, nor look at, any one, but sat immoveable and silent.

Villa Franca, who had been pluming himself on his good fortune, in being of a sudden changed from a solitary traveller, exposed to all the dangers of the road, into a denizen of the Louvre, with every chance of opening a negotiation with the imprisoned monarch with due secrecy, had forgotten Chicot's ring. But Valois's command to the colonel of the Swiss, indicated in plain terms that the anger of the queen had taken effect ; and his sagacity admonished him that some share of peril might fall to his own lot, when the matter was explained. This was a source of great trouble. He leaned against the wall, seemingly as gloomy and thoughtful as the monarch himself, who sat opposite : Amiôt was adjusting the plumage of the cap, which had suffered some damage in its fall, and Davila stood like a statue awaiting his liege's pleasure.

No one spoke but the almoner, who muttered, occasionally, something unintelligible, while employed in arranging the regalia of the incipient order ; nothing, however, could be indicated farther than the grumbling tone of the soliloquy.

Things continued in this state till a noise being heard in the ante-room, the door was flung open, and displayed the ireful Catherine followed by Chicot.

The weak, favourite-ridden monarch, who, like our second Edward, could not exist without the society of men to heap favours on, and be governed by, sprung to his feet on seeing

the jester; but the queen-mother, in a stern voice, commanding Chicot to remain where he was, walked up to her son, and desired him to reseat himself. In a few words she related in his ear the presumptuous audacity and insolence of the jester, and concluded by presenting him with the ring which had been flung in her face.

Villa Franca, who guessed the purport of her narrative, drew in his breath with fear: it was a critical moment; the eye of the queen flashed with rage, and he felt assured that it would soon be turned upon himself. Chicot discovered his lost friend, and nodded in token of friendship; but pointing to his feet, shook his head, as much as to say, that he could not stir from the spot on account of the queen's command.

Our young friend, however, took little heed of the jester's mummery, but watched the countenances of both Valois and Catherine, while the former was replying to her complaints. At length he saw the king point to himself, and Catherine turn round and survey him with a look of fire. My hour is come! thought Villa Franca. But it was delayed a few minutes. Chicot was called, interrogated, and dismissed to his former post.

"Now fortune befriend me, or I am lost!" exclaimed the young man to himself. The queen-mother, being satisfied of the identity of the culprit, walked up to him with an expression menacing ruin; and in a voice calm as the unruffled ocean, which yet hides a thousand tempests in its bosom, said—

"Our jester has suffered imprisonment, and on a wrong surmise."

Villa Franca bowed: his penitent look deprecated her resentment.

"And what reason is there that you should not take his place?" exclaimed the queen-mother.

When Villa Franca first beheld the queen approaching him, he knew not what to say: his brain was barren—there dwelt in it only a sense of terror; but to her questioning he replied, as it were intuitively, in the manner of one remembering a prophecy or dream.

"No man that ever possesses our secrets shall tell them but to God. You are in our confidence, and therefore must continue in it. If you cannot assist us, you must run with us—if you cannot help on the wheels of state, you must hold fast to the chariot."

"Continue in it!" exclaimed Catherine, forgetting her anger in her astonishment at the nature of his reply, which, it will be

remembered, was a repetition of what she declared to the secretary, "continue in it!" Then adding, with a bitter sneer, "shall we make you secretary of state, or colonel-general of the forces?"

"I am unworthy of either," replied Villa Franca. "I should be worthy only of the Bastille had I designedly sought your majesty's secrets. It was accident which conducted me thither; and I knew not your royal person till the conference discovered it. I presented the ring to save myself from the secretary's rapier. It has saved my life, that I might offer myself to your majesty's service. And though I am inefficient as a state-secretary or general, there are many things done in this palace which I am competent to perform."

Catherine surveyed him with increased astonishment; she had never before met with what she was pleased to think such unparalleled audacity.—He was a curiosity.

"And so, like the small fish of the ocean," exclaimed the queen, "you would avoid danger by rushing down its throat."

"I would support the power which threatens to crush me," replied the young man.

"Che sara sara!" muttered Catherine; then speaking to Villa Franca, who was in agony to know what impression his boldness had made, she said, "deliver up your sword to Davila!"

"Thank heaven! I am safe!" exclaimed he, inwardly.—If I were a heathen, half my fortune should purchase a votive offering for Mercury. And thereupon, he surrendered his weapon to the usher.

But the triumph of the diplomatist was turned into dismay and alarm.

"Let Grillon lodge this spy in the custody of our trusty Le Clerc!" added the queen.

Resistance was useless—and the ill-fated traveller was consigned to the Bastille.

CHAPTER VII.

I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,
Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could,¹
And, like a Sinon, take another Troy ;
I can add colours e'en to the cameleon ;
Change shapes with Proteus for advantages ;
And set th' aspiring Catiline to school.
Can I do this, and cannot get a crown ?
Tut, were it farther off, I'll pluck it down !

KING HENRY VI.

IN the *Rue St. Antoine* stood an edifice associated in the minds of the zealous citizens and the insidious priesthood with their dearest hopes—their most coveted wishes ; and whose name alone cast a spell over the councils of its magnificent rival, the Louvre. Although of humble pretensions in point of architecture, the Hotel de Guise was yet enshrined in the hearts of the over-excited Catholics, even as the sacred edifice on Mount Moriah was revered by the Israelites of old. Its princely owner, by a long course of subtle policy, aided by many concurring and fortuitous circumstances, and above all, by the overwhelming power of the ecclesiastical influence, had nourished in the people a deadly hatred against the house of Valois ; and was now preparing to wrest the sceptre from the hands of his almost powerless suzerain.

As pilgrims voyaging to Mount Carmel fervently bow the head towards the hallowed hill, when the mariner proclaims its vicinity, so did the trusty burgesses of Paris doff their bonnets while passing the abode of their protector ; and with equal ignorance and superstition, was the Louvre desecrated and abhorred by the partisans of the great enemy of the court.

On the morning of Valois's arrival at the palace, and while the search after the traveller was at its height, the Duke of Guise was quietly engaged at his hotel, discussing with several associates matters connected with his ambitious policy. They were assembled in a lofty apartment, hung around with antique faded tapestry, and lighted by one large window, which admitted a flood of light on the table standing between the Lorrainese prince and his two friends, left the more distant part of the chamber in comparative gloom.

A chair of crimson damask, high-backed, and with arms affording a posture of luxurious ease to its occupant, contained the noble figure of the duke, whose well moulded limbs, habited in a rich vesture of white and crimson, displayed the graceful person of monseigneur to the best advantage. The features of Guise were stern and harsh rather than handsome, and a rugged, uneven eyebrow added to their disagreeable aspect ; but the original defects of his face were forgotten by the beholder, when he saw the ever ready smile, the conciliating address, and heard the flattering tone of this politic chief.

The two cavaliers with whom the duke was discoursing in rather a gayer tone than suited the matter under consideration, were tried and valued associates. In the taller, who stood indolently lounging between Guise and the window, and intercepted the bright beams which hastening day cast on the friendly conclave, was recognised the easy demeanour of a scion of the noblesse, yet with aspect bold and courageous as became a kinsman of Lorraine—for of such alliance could the Chevalier D'Aumale boast : his abilities, though not equal to the conduct of a party, were admirably adapted for a secondary station.

The other was seated at the table, leaning over it, in the act of listening to the colloquy between the noble speakers, and though eager to catch every word that was uttered, yet rarely spoke, save when appealed to. But though not eloquent in council, Colonel St. Paul was as useful to the holy cause as the chevalier ; he had from the ranks fought his way to the command of a regiment of arquebusiers in that army over which the duke had been appointed lieutenant-general by an abused and confiding monarch.

At the extreme end of the chamber, the tapestried hangings were fashioned so as to display to view a recess, in which might be discerned, seated at a table, and engaged in writing, the figure of one in the monastic garb. The light of the taper, by which he was enabled to pursue his clerkly occupation, was reflected from the pale stern features of a monk, whom fancy might have deemed well befitting the confessor of Spain's bigoted monarch, the presiding priest of an *auto da fé*—or, as was the truth, an instigator of the bloody massacre of St. Bartholomew. Scarcely noticed by Guise and his friends, from whose loud converse he had retreated to prepare the parchments on which he was intently engaged—a stranger on entering the chamber might have been awe-struck on beholding

the tenant of the recess ;—his pale, illumined face, contrasting with the dark robes of his order, the outstretched parchment over which the scarcely flickering taper threw its needful light, would induce the belief that the curtained tapestry had been drawn aside to reveal a magic vision—that the half-faded forms of Jason and his Argonauts, whose adventures were depicted on the hangings, had given place to a minister of modern necromancy, a servant of the dread inquisition.

But although this holy scribe found the vivacious dialogue of the duke and his friends incompatible with attention to his own learned handiwork, and often knit his brows in silence as the unrestrained joke burst upon his ear, yet the converse, though mirthful, was on a subject of deep interest even to the unwilling auditor, who was oft tempted to pause and listen. Nor was this the only element of connexion between the monk and the gay associates in the forepart of the chamber. Occasionally he found it necessary, in the progress of his task, to ask advice of the duke—the jocose colloquy of the cavaliers was instantly suspended, and there ensued words foreboding ruin to the ill-fated Valois.

These interruptions over, the monk resumed his labour, and the conversation of the friends reverted to its former channel.

They were engaged in a lively discussion on the respective abilities of the compatriot burgesses of the city, the tools of the ambitious Guise, in his deep laid design on the throne of France. But these worthy citizens deserve a more extended notice.

Gradation of rank, subordination to chiefs, and delegation of individual obedience, must prevail among a multitude ere their efforts can effect the overthrow of long constituted authority. A sudden popular commotion may unseat a tyrannic dynasty, but tyranny in another shape speedily regains its power, unless opposed by a well-ordered union of the people. The Duke of Guise had been a witness of what had been effected by the townsmen in the Low Countries in their successful combination of municipal force against military chivalry ; and his aim was to unite the citizens of Paris into a well-disciplined corps, that when measures were ripe, they might sally forth with the strength and confidence of a garrison. But through a wise, calculating policy, he carefully concealed this, his utmost wish, from the citizens at large ; he knew not how deeply seated might be the latent feeling of affection, which ever exists in the heart of a people towards a dynasty of many centuries ; and he resolved that every movement of the in-

cient rebellion should spring from the citizens. Who then could accuse him of conspiracy? That the priesthood and the monastic orders had instilled into the minds of the people a bitter hatred against Valois, was not his crime; that the citizens had formed a league for the preservation of the Catholic religion, that they had invited the co-operation of the lawyers, the clergy, and the noblesse, in their holy cause, and that these classes had obeyed the request, was not his act; the league, which daily grew in strength and discipline, appointing, in the first instance, a council of forty, which gradually concentrated into an executive conclave of sixteen, each member representing a ward of the city, was not his doing; and how could he prevent, as he speciously averred before the court, this same council of sixteen, this soul of the League, from earnestly soliciting him to become the protector of the Catholic faith!

Thus, by the aid of the priesthood, were all his measures brought to fruition without his seeming help; and what he most coveted fell to his lot apparently unsolicited. But though this subtle refinement of policy was successful, yet the unambitious mask which he wore concealed a fiery soul, which fretted impatiently at the slow progress of his upward-borne career.

To all but himself his policy appeared over-refined. To his secret complaints of the tardiness of the citizens, his friends D'Aumale, St. Paul, Madame Montpensier, the duke's sister, a woman of strong passions, and of an ambition equaling his own, his priestly emissaries and secret coadjutors, all replied by urging on him the necessity of a more personal course of action—that it was time to throw aside the mask, and strike boldly for a crown.

It was on this subject that the chevalier was rallying him, in so lightsome a spirit, that the holy scribe had been forced to withdraw as far as possible from within hearing of the contest.

"There is not one of our sixteen friends," said D'Aumale, "that is not continually pressing me to declare what more the protector would have him do! There is the burly egg-merchant, La Chapelle Martel, who declares that he will propose, at the next meeting of the council, that *Monsieur Le Duc* be superseded in the protectorate by his sister, *Madame la Duchesse*; and he offered to stake three boats' cargoes that she would don her cuirass, and march at the head of the battallions of the League."

"The egg-merchant is right," exclaimed Guise, laughing; "Catherine would wear gauntlets and haubergeon as readily as her vertu-gardin. It would be almost worth the folly of such a step to witness the encounter with her namesake of the Louvre. Colonel! we'll drink to-day at dinner to the meeting of the two Catherines!"

"Joyfully, monseigneur!" cried St. Paul. "By the holy apostle, madame is a brave princess. My arquebusiers would follow her to the gates of—"

"Hold!" exclaimed the duke, with a jerk of the head towards the recess; "we are within the pale of the Church. The father and yourself never agree on phraseology."

"Ah?" muttered the colonel, "he never-kept company with the brotherhood at Besançon. If ever I turn monk, I will go—"

"To Grandmontans!" said Guise, interrupting him.

"You should hear the Sieur Barnabas Brisson, your little friend the draper, lecture on the penitents of Grandmontans," cried the chevalier. "Poor Barnabas! he is longing for the day when he shall address Henry of Lorraine at the foot of the throne! He is the very Cicero of drapers—"

"And is as ready to cut the throats of Bouillon and De Joyeuse as an ell, spare by three inches, of broad cloth!" cried the Lorraine. "Is it not so, cousin? Well, well—the dogs shall have their day; they have not forgotten what our Lady of the Louvre—a good friend of mine in those days—calls the dispensation of St. Bartholomew! But I am interrupting you, chevalier, in your stimulative prescription. Two of the fiery martial pills are bolted—I will help myself to a third. Now, what says our friend, the sage Rocheblond, to my dilatoriness?"

"He says," rejoined the chevalier, in a serious tone, "that your object in keeping back is to force your honest friends to commit themselves with the court beyond reprieve, while you judge of the safety of each step before you put out your foot."

All trace of levity instantly forsook the duke.

"Kinsman," said he, addressing the chevalier, "look to that escutcheon above the mirror. There are nine quarters—each the charge of a sovereign house,—Lorraine, Hungary, Sicily, Jerusalem, Arragon, Anjou, Guelders, Flanders, and Bar.—These illustrious bearings, the pride of our house, must not be wantonly exposed to the same risk as the chattels of a mercenary citizen. He who has much to lose, must wait till the tide is deep enough to freight him safely. The poor man is

the first to feel the biting grasp of tyranny—let him be the first to raise an arm against his oppressor—let him give firm assurance of his courage and determination to the chieftain to whom he appeals for aid. No, no, D'Aumale ! the golden lilies shall be won, if Heaven do not fight against us. But ere I compromise the honours of Lorraine, Catholic France must call upon me with a loud voice—must call to me with the sword in her hand !”

“*Sanctissime !* my work is done !” cried a voice from the recess. Guise started : he had forgotten, in his rising enthusiasm, the presence of the monk.

“I am usurping your province, Father Lincestre,” exclaimed the duke, when he had recovered from his surprise ; “and I see plainly it becomes me not ; for the colonel is gaping to find the key to my eloquence. But in good honest words, this is my policy :—we must make the trusty burgesses of Paris lose themselves with Valois beyond reprieve ; and this shall be done ere I draw my sword, unless the holy church points out a surer path.”

“The temporal safety of the church has been entrusted to the keeping of the Duke of Guise,” said Lincestre, in a solemn tone ; in which however, the Protector of the League recognised the concealed irony of the speaker, who liked not his excessive caution, and who now approached the group with the parchment in his hands.

As the monk advanced towards the window, it required no stretch of fancy in the beholder to trace in the lines of his pale face the vestiges of more absorbing cares than are encountered in the studious cloister. He had, indeed, forsaken the convent to join with the Parisian preachers in the task of de-throning their sovereign ; and the stern eloquence of his declamation, the relentless hatred which he evinced towards the court, and the influence which he speedily gained over the minds of the citizens, recommended him to Guise as a fitting instrument of medium between the leaguers and their aspiring, but subtle protector.

“I crave your mercy, good father,” exclaimed the duke ; “I see you are inclined to the argument of the chevalier—yet, in justice to my prudence, let our friends hear from your mouth the covenant which we have prepared to bind the good Parisians to their principles.”

Lincestre, upon this appeal, relaxed somewhat of his austerity ; for the gay badinage of the duke and his coadjutors he had felt no sympathy—their attempts at wit elicited not the

most transient smile over his rigid features—and they were forced, in their intercourse with him, to adopt a seriousness of tone more in unison with that of their ghostly adviser.

But in all that concerned the advancement of the League, he was the readiest and least scrupulous of the enemies of Valois. The document which he read aloud—in a voice singularly impressive, from a peculiar high-pitched monotony of tone, the usual characteristic of his delivery, save when the imagination was excited—purported to be a covenant between the members of the League, by which they severally agreed to declare Henry of Valois incapable of holding the crown—and themselves, consequently, dissolved of their allegiance—and that the security of the holy faith was to be intrusted to the Duke of Guise, to whom also was to be confided the conduct of their armies, their fleets, and their money.

When the monk had made an end of reading the declaration, Guise, turning to his kinsman, cried, in an exulting tone—

“Well, chevalier! will the leaguers be able to escape from these meshes? Nor shall their singing this covenant be kept a secret. The original, or a skilful copy, might easily be dropped in the Louvre; and then, farewell to the safety of our good friends the leaguers, except in arms!”

The colonel and the chevalier laughed at the politic device of their chief; and a smile stole over the face of the monk.

“But you will never make them put their hands to that parchment,” replied D’Aumale, “unless you first withdraw your allegiance from the crown, in company with St. Paul and his brother colonels. Even that stupid-faced Nicholas Poulain is not so hoodwinked as to put his neck in jeopardy, unless St. Paul’s arquebusiers were ready to protect his doublet and the ribs beneath it.”

“We will see,” cried the duke, looking significantly at the monk. “Leave it to Father Lincestre and myself. As for Nicholas Poulain, I rate him higher than you do in his class. I cannot tell how it is, but although Nicholas is certainly the most stupid-looking and insignificant of all the leaguers, and so dull that he does not even attempt to shine, as though he were satisfied of his own inanity, yet he has a deeper hold on my attention than even the swaggering egg-merchant or little Barnabas. Poulain, somehow or another, never makes an error; he looks about as a sheep while you are giving your commands; and he leaves you with a leisurely *insouciant* air, that forbids every hope of seeing your bidding executed, till you

are surprised at the news of its completion, and in exactly the manner in which you wished it done."

"Truly, monseigneur!" replied D'Aumale, smiling, "you rate that excellent passive nature of the Lieutenant Nicholas above the bold faculty of enterprise. Often have I carried Poulain with me when visiting our friends in their separate stations: the creature followed like a spaniel, though without the quickness of the animal. A learned monk told me that it was a constitutional infirmity under which our Nicholas laboured—a defect of animal spirits, which rendered him dull, sluggish, sleepy, and careless of what was passing around, though with sufficient aptitude to execute the appointed task, avoiding perhaps, through his lukewarmness of blood, the mishaps and failings of nobler men. As for me, I always likened him to one of those shapely blocks of wood which our peasants set up to be knocked down again. But if he is to be held up as a model to the League,—why then, St. Paul and I had better leave off drinking wine—sit at the council-board with a closed mouth, like poor deserted saints in a heretic land—and walk about as noiselessly as a cat, to win the fair guerdon of applause from the illustrious descendant of chivalric kings!"

"Is not my cousin D'Aumale a man of eloquence?" said the Duke of Guise, addressing, in a sprightly manner, the monk, now employed in pondering intently on the parchment, quite careless of the colloquy. "Madame D'Usez must not say that the Guisards have the venom of the serpent without its guile, and the sting of the bee without its wisdom. D'Aumale has proved himself worthy to buzz on Hymettus. Nay, father! I beseech your attention. This is a matter of deep moment to the interests of the League—it concerns the capabilities of one of its most useful officers—Citizen Poulain—the worthy Lieutenant Nicholas Poulain, of the municipal police. What say you, father?"

"If Nicholas Poulain," said the monk, slowly raising up his head till his eyes encountered the debonnair glance of the arch-leaguer, "were a man of great natural parts and learning, that sheep's face of his would be a mask of invaluable price—it would baffle the searching of a Dominican!"

"Baffle a Dominican!" shouted St. Paul, "it would baffle Lucifer! One day, during dinner, I removed his wine-cup out of mirth—he never missed it for a long time; and when his thirst did condescend to be inquisitive, he was all amaze-

ment, but said quietly that a spirit must have taken it away. 'Impossible,' I replied, 'when I saw it the wine was gone, and a spirit is too good a judge to seize an empty cup.' But the simpleton only answered as quietly as before, 'These bad spirits have a great sympathy with empty vessels.'"

Whether it arose from the very unusual length of his narration, the colonel did not know; but his speech was rewarded with a fair greeting of laughter from monseigneur and the chevalier, and, above all, by a grim smile, like a strangled laugh, from the monk.

This conversation was put an end to by the sudden entrance of a citizen, who was immediately recognised as La Rocheblond, one of the most influential burgesses of Paris. With the air of a man recently escaped from peril, and still suffering from the effects of fear, he related to the duke that the gates of the city had been suddenly closed—that the inhabitants were in a state of alarm, expecting a *coup de main* on the part of the court—and that he, for the sake of himself and his brother leaguers, implored the protection of the Duke of Guise against the fury of the queen-mother.

Ere Lorraine could glean a more detailed account of the movement by questioning the fearful citizen, he was interrupted by the arrival of La Chapelle Martel. Unlike the timorous La Rocheblond, this leaguer showed no signs of fear; with eyes flashing fire, a face flushed into a sanguinary hue, and a carriage bold and abrupt, as of one careless of the respect due to superior rank, he strode across the chamber, and declared aloud that the time was now arrived when the battle of the League and the holy church must be fought, and the duke, with St. Paul and his military friends, draw their swords in defence of religion and their own security.

"Linestre!" whispered Guise, addressing his monastic secretary, "we shall now have the covenant signed if you do but keep abreast with my play."

"Fear not the poverty of my wit in the service of our holy faith," replied the monk, in the same low tone of voice.

"How is this, La Chapelle?" cried Guise, "let us be made acquainted with the danger we run."

"Danger! there is no danger! I scorn the very name of it!" shouted the heroic Martel; "the old lady has shut the gates—caged us in like fowls in a hen-coop—that our necks may be wrung at her pleasure. There is a cry in the streets that the garrison of Vincennes is marching on the city—be it so—the end of Valois is at hand—*Montjoie St. Denis* shall

be silenced in death amid our cries of *Vive Henri de Lorraine !*"

The cause of the gates being closed was still a mystery to the duke and his kinsman. Whether Catherine really meditated a *coup d'état*, or was merely trying the courage of her rebellious subjects, was of less importance to the protector of the citizens than their signing of the covenant. Any measure which tended to drive into despair and rebellion the leaguers, was a manifest furthering of his subtle aims ; and he thanked Catherine, in his heart, for her activity.

"Where are your brethren of the council?" asked he, in a calm voice, of the fierce La Chapelle, whose impatience and fervour but ill assorted with the pacific demeanour of the assembly.

"Where?" cried the egg-merchant with a sneer, "wherever the impulse of their mind has driven them: some to gather news—others to buckle on their swords—and many, no doubt, will be here anon. Colonel St. Paul, I thank the holy saints that your regiment is within the walls."

"*Quo me, Bellona, rapis—tui plenum?*" whispered the duke of Guise to Lincestre, in ridicule of the martial heroism of La Chapelle ; but the unbending humour of the monk could not sympathize with the pleasantry of his chief ; he was, moreover, deeply intent on the mode to be adopted in enforcing the subscription of the covenant.

As the egg-merchant had spoken, so it proved. The doorway was darkened by a crowd of citizen-leaguers, headed by the Sieur Barnabas Brisson, member of the council of sixteen, and draper of the *Rue St. Denis*. While La Rocheblond had proved himself sage in council, and timorous at the prospect of danger, and La Chapelle, whose speeches in conclave were short and abrupt, had manifested his contempt of peril with heroic bluster, Sieur Barnabas added one more instance to the often-remarked fact, that eloquence and fear were in-dwellers of the same spiritual tenement.

With a trembling voice, the little vender of cloth, after indulging in a complimentary strain, and eulogizing the virtues and bravery of the Duke of Guise, besought the illustrious chief to betake himself to their rescue at this hour of peril ; and to stand forward in the front of the battle while warring with an iniquitous court, as he had often done while combating the hated Huguenot and the foreigner.

To this declamation monsieur listened, as he had done to the preceding appeals, with complacency ; and when the little

orator had concluded, he put the same question to him as he had asked of the others, to know the particular circumstances which had created such alarm in the breasts of his worthy friends. Barnabas, and the members of the council who had accompanied him, replied by quoting a string of rumours which had assailed them on all sides, of the warlike proceedings of the court subsequent to the closing of the city gates. That *Porte St. Antoine* and the other barriers had been closed by authority, appeared to Guise to be the only fact recorded by the sage sixteen, and one in which all agreed; the rest was but rumour, and that of the most vague kind. He, however, turned to ask privately of D'Aumale his opinion, whether there was any real cause of alarm, and to despatch an emissary to make inquiry. But the chevalier was missing.

While Guise was debating with the sixteen on the measures to be adopted at this uncertain crisis, Lincestre, who had retired to the recess at the entrance of the *Sieur Barnabas*, now approached the group, and launched out in a style that immediately arrested their attention, and forced silence.

After dwelling on the necessity of the league, and extolling the purpose to which it was ordained, he continued:—

“While you, my children, are wrapped in sleep, I keep a strict vigil through the night, that my soul may contemplate in serenity the holy mission to which it is bound. While you, like the soldiers which guarded the holy apostle, sleep on your posts, I await through the calm night to hear the divine voice which is to liberate the church from bondage—you from allegiance to a wicked ruler—and all France from the scourge of his sway. Nor has my chastening task been without reward. Brethren! I have been assured of our freedom! Christians! of the one true faith, I have received words of comfort to the church! Leaguers! I hold your destiny in my hands!”

Seeing that he had made a favourable impression on his awe-struck audience, he proceeded, in a lofty rhapsodical style, to announce the miracle in which he had been a willing agent. Omitting the monk's rhetorical arabesques, it was one of a character common to religious enthusiasts. After a night spent in deep study, and ere the day broke upon his vigils, he had thrown himself exhausted on his hard pallet, and immediately sunk into a revery, in which he lost all consciousness of his local habitation. Gradually, however—although without awaking from his trance—he became aware of the surrounding objects—his own recumbent position—the form of the dormitory—and the crucifix on the walls. He.

found himself refreshed, as by a long sleep, although convinced by the struggling light of morn that his repose had been but of very short duration. His eye caught the sculptured face of the divine image, and his conscience smote him for omitting to bow the knee, ere he sought repose, to the portrayed agony, which, throughout Christendom, checks the vain pride of man. Slowly he bowed his head in penitence—and immediately, to his sense of vision, the agony forsook the brow, the eye beamed upon him, and he sank back, and covered his face with his hands.

It was while in this state that he heard a voice whispering in his ear that he was chosen to restore the prostrate church, and that he must bind the servants of the church in a holy bond of union, ere peace could exist among the sons of France ; that the League must become spiritual ere it could perform a spiritual task ; that it must become a concord, and a manifestation of the church militant, ere heresy could be extinguished, and the lamp of the true faith illumine the hearts of its scattered flock.

When the voice ceased speaking, he removed his hands ; the agony was on the brow, the eye was turned upward, and the light of day fell upon his own lowly couch. But he felt himself endued with a new gift of fervour, a strength of body and mind superior to every earthly task of labour, a craving desire to achieve his ministration—and, full of a spirit of prayer, he knelt down before the sensuous reflection of the mortal agony of omnipotence.

Having carefully worked upon the hearts of his audience by topics of this nature, the preacher descended to a consideration of the human implements of the mission. He informed the leaguers of his alacrity in obeying the high behest, of the composition of the covenant, but that the words were not his own, but seemed to flow into his mind without volition, and that the hand obeyed the inspiration. He produced the parchment, and read over the formula of the union ; and finally he asked of them to affix their signatures or cognizances to the declaration.

Silence followed the appeal of the monk ; the leaguers were awe-struck by the supernatural tone of the narration, and trembled, as they had often done, before the gifted preacher. Still they signed not, but looked at each other in dread, and Lincestre with a glance of anger turned away.

His pride was mortified : he had been accustomed to witness the wildest ebullitions of enthusiasm follow his preaching—

he had expected implicit obedience—and persuasion he would never condescend to. But Lincestre forgot that the act which he required of each was destructive of enthusiasm, which seizes upon masses of people, and drives them, as one flock, headlong with united impulse, to rush together to the battle-field, or pull down the altars of a heretic creed, or destroy the monuments of long-established authority. But the act of a subscription to a perilous declaration is so individual, singular, and the opposite of gregarious, that our honest citizens paused ere they jeopardied their necks.

But as the fiery Lincestre forsook the arena of contest, the wily Guise took his place in the field; a worthy irresistible pair to fight in the same cause, for even were the onslaught of the threatening monk baffled, yet how could the enemy withstand the undermining insidious attack of the arch-leaguer.

He affected to be equally surprised with the citizens at the narration of the preacher, displayed regret at his anger, and asked of them what common sentiment filled all their hearts, inimical to the progress of the holy League.

"I speak only for myself," replied the rough La Chapelle, seeing his compatriots afraid to answer: "I am sure Heaven fights on our side against the old dame and her son's impious crew, and I have faith in Father Lincestre. But we are mere mortals, gross-eaters, and drink wine at each other's houses, and I have not the courage to see my name put to that covenant unless the names of the powerful nobles who profess to be our friends in every province of France were written first. Monseigneur must know that his compeers live in security; but for very trifling causes, the Italian virago and her cubs have sent the Swiss at night to convey many of our class to the Bastile. We should be safe enough in the dungeons of that hell ere the Duke of Guise could rescue us."

The audible symptoms of approbation which followed this speech intimated to the duke how fully the leaguers sympathized with their brother-member; yet he determined that the eloquence of the holy secretary, and his own covert endeavours, should not be lost without a farther struggle, and began to expostulate anew with the fears of the council; and in doing this he appeared to act rather as a mediator between Lincestre and the burgesses, than as an advocate on his own behoof.

During this colloquy, D'Aumale, who, anticipating the wish of his kinsman, had glided from the chamber to make himself acquainted with the truth or falsehood of the alarming rumours, now returned, and approaching the duke, whispered to him:—

"I have spoken to Grillon, and he told me in his blunt way that my neck was safe; that the gates have been closed to prevent the escape of a servant who had robbed the queen."

The citizens eyed the chevalier with suspicion, and La Chapelle cried—

"It does not become an ally of the council to whisper his thoughts at this season of danger."

"Repeat aloud what you have said, D'Aumale!" exclaimed the duke.

The chevalier looked confused, as though his whispered thoughts were not meet for the public ear; but the duke, looking at him significantly, reiterated his request, saying that he would not shrink from the danger which menaced his friends.

"I merely advised my kinsman to seek a place of more safety than this unguarded mansion," said D'Aumale, who took the silent hint, being fully alive to the necessity of exaggerating the peril of the leaguers, in order to ensnare them into the subscription of the covenant, "as I expected that the division of the Swiss, now drawn up in the Tuileries, are about to pounce upon their prey."

This communication struck a panic in the majority of the council; even the fierce La Chapelle dreaded the anticipated domiciliary visit of the royal troops. He and his associates had, through the proverbial weakness of the court, and their own stimulated arrogance and presumption, waded so deeply into the waters of rebellion, that they now believed that the imbecile monarch, or his politic parent, had taken courage to crush them by a sudden *coup de main* ere the strength of the League was ripe for open resistance. Their nature knew no firm medium in which to contemplate their own position; insolent triumph was succeeded by a weak, fearful, misgiving spirit; and they clung to their protector for comfort and support.

"Let monseigneur remain at the Hotel de Guise!" cried Colonel St. Paul, rising; "my arquebusiers shall turn the *Rue St. Antoine* into a fortress. We have not forgot the use of the chain-barricade! Let our friends, each of them, repair to his ward, call out his comrades, and throw up the barricades. Now is the time for action."

"Now is the hour of triumph for the holy faith!" exclaimed Lincestre, in his most impassioned style, and approaching the group of leaguers, "my sacred office is fulfilled! I must now buckle on the sword and cuirass!"

"Stay, father!" cried the now submissive La Chapelle Martel, "you must forgive our unworthy fears; but let us, ere we begin

the blockade, make our peace with your reverence, and sign the covenant of union. We shall be the braver for it."

And so saying, the heroic burgess ran to the recess, and bringing the parchment to the leaguers, affixed his name to the declaration in their presence; his example was followed by all the Sixteen, to the secret joy of the arch-leaguer, and the satisfaction of his subtle policy.

CHAPTER VIII.

Veux-tu savoir quel est l'estat de notre France?
Un jeune roi mené par un peuple malduit—
Mené par une mère eperdue à outrance.

PASQUIER.

THE council of the League retired from the presence of the protector in the full belief that Catherine, roused to revenge, had determined to crush her foes by a *coup de main* as sudden and vigorous as any which had marked her earlier career.

Impressed with this conviction, and sensible of the peril which awaited a rupture between the leaguers and their powerful chief, La Chapelle no longer hesitated signing the covenant; and, by his seeming zeal, sought to make that an act of courage which was in truth the result of fear.

While the members of the council, after an exhortation from Guise to barricade the several wards of the city, and a promise to go over to them with his division of the army, left the hotel to join their fellow-citizens in the streets, whose busy murmurs the fear of the Sixteen magnified into actual warfare, the crafty triumvirate were congratulating each other on the success of their policy.

"Father," cried D'Aumale, "I am now a convert to your often-reiterated axiom, that nothing is impossible to the man who unites himself to the power of the Church."

"Son," replied Lincestre, "you were an heretic ever to doubt."

"But I have yet to learn, *Monsieur le Duc*," said the chevalier, addressing Lorraine, "why you have not rather turned this extraordinary accident into a real contest? As the Sixteen were in the humour to barricade their streets, why not at once

send St. Paul to assist them ! The barriers once formed, the city would be impenetrable to the royal troops—nay, very soon the Louvre would itself be in a state of siege, and perhaps straitened for provisions. In three days the palace would capitulate, and yourself be King of France.”

“Not so, D’Aumale,” replied Guise, smiling at the arguments of the chevalier ; “these citizens are like snakes, they never turn round till they are trodden on. As they go home, they will look in vain for either Swiss or artillery, their fears and their enthusiasm will vanish together, and they will re-open their shops. No, no ! I will make Catherine lash my future subjects with rods of steel, till all sense of duty is beaten out of them. Besides, they are not yet sufficiently trained ; neither are the holy orders yet skilful with the arquebuse. Your brethren, Lincestre, will make a glorious army !”

In this mood they continued discoursing till interrupted by the entrance of one who had a message to communicate to the duke. The messenger was a man rather below the middle height, of slender yet inelegant frame, with features which, to borrow the language of art, seemed unfinished—the clay model of a face wanting the last touches of the artist : not ugly or deformed, but deficient of modelling—the delicate tracery and curves ; those channels of thought and expression, which bespeak the mind dwelling within. His dress was that of a commandant of police, a costume alone which saved him from utter insignificance.

“You are welcome, lieutenant !” exclaimed Guise, who expected a message from La Chapelle, and was trying in vain to elicit from Nicholas’s face (that dull impression of the great seal of humanity) the complexion of the news which he bore. The message was even as the duke anticipated ; a communication from the egg-merchant, that Catherine had suddenly abandoned her warlike movement, and that the city was quiet, save from the subsiding excitement of the citizens.

“I will trust this Poulain,” said Guise to himself ;—“some one of his station must be taken into my confidence ; and why not the discreet Nicholas ?”

“Lieutenant,” continued he, aloud, “I must consult with you ere I advise Monsieur La Chapelle how to behave.”

Lincestre and the chevalier understood their chief, and retired.

“Nicholas,” said the protector, in a careless voice, “you have worked for me, and through me, for France and our holy Church, and yet have never asked for reward. The Sixteen

have worried me with importunate requests for places and pensions when I shall have them to bestow."

"The Sixteen are your servants, monseigneur," replied Poulain, without moving a muscle, or betraying either pleasure or surprise at the observation of the duke, "and I am the servant of the Sixteen. They ask you for wages, and I seek my arrears from them."

"And are contented?" inquired Guise, scarcely looking at the lieutenant. Like other diplomatists, he was indeed aware that the mind is oft found portrayed in the visage, but beside the hopelessness of such a task with Poulain, his sagacity taught him that the too searching glance of an interrogator often warns rather than betrays the victim.

"I cannot call myself contented, monseigneur, till the League has made an end of its labours," replied the lieutenant.

Guise, who understood by this a reference to his own future elevation to the throne, smiled complacently at what he could not but admire as an adroit compliment for one of Nicholas's station; it led him, besides, to the object of the conference.

"And yet, Monsieur Poulain," cried the protector, looking at him steadily for the first time, "our road to happiness, unluckily, is crooked and dangerous."

The duke continued gazing on the municipal officer; but his face was a blank chart,—as of one confused, and looking at his oracle for the elucidation of the mystery, yet without the least sign of curiosity.

"Poulain," exclaimed the duke, rather quickly, "I will speak plainer. The League itself is like a ship beaten about by the winds, and very far from its destined haven. This very day, a fair breeze sprung up—but alas! it soon shifted! The leaguers would have fought and conquered, if they had been attacked! Ah!" continued he, "you now understand me!"

Nicholas was, indeed, not wholly unmoved, at least so thought the duke, who felt no little pleasure in having achieved the miracle of creating an expression of interest in the face of this passive servant of the League.

"I am sure the citizens would have fought to the utmost," said Poulain.

"It would have begun with a barricade, and ended with the capture of the Louvre," exclaimed Guise, "and it may be long ere such another opportunity is offered to the League. Catherine's shrinking policy has served her well."

"Do not despair, monseigneur," cried Nicholas, with his

characteristic apathy of voice; "my honest masters will speedily goad her majesty into anger again."

"Aye, but the delay, Poulain!" cried the duke, rising from his chair and leading Nicholas to the window:—"this delay is dangerous to the League; but you have power to remedy it. The destiny of myself, of my friends—of your masters, as they now are, but with whom you may soon rank as equal, nay, superior—if you have courage to fire the train which shall exterminate our enemies! Speak, have you that courage?"

"I never shrank from the duties of my office," replied Nicholas.

The calm, unconcerned manner in which Poulain replied, almost staggered the excited noble, whose glowing ambition felt itself humiliated by the cold temperament of the lieutenant.

"Speak! Nicholas Poulain!" exclaimed the protector, seizing the arm of the municipal officer.

"I have already told monseigneur that I am not destitute of courage," replied he.

Seldom was Lorraine known to exhibit the vehemence of temper which was his portion from birth. Usually calm and jocose, he won rather than fought with mankind—but the passiveness of this suborning monarch provoked him beyond control, and he darted on his stagnant visage a scorching glance, which would have quailed aught save insensibility.

"You mock me, Poulain!" exclaimed he; "are you bloodless, lifeless? Am I speaking to a man, or some demon sent to taunt ambition?—Shall I give you my confidence?—will it draw forth from where should be thy heart, one bubble of joy—of pride? What hope have you?—what pleasure of life, what sympathy with you? Can I open my breast to a statue—to a shadow? Pour into it my hopes—and no echo but a hollow sound?"

"Awe and familiarity, monseigneur, are extremes, but they sometimes meet," said the official:—"I will serve the Duke of Guise in all that he asks of me—but I always distrust myself—I know my own presumption and arrogance, and keep a check upon them—duty and obedience I make weigh down my too forward spirit!"

"This is better! You speak a mystery! You talk of arrogance! Do you not labour under a delusion! Yes, I have known such men as you before! But it is well said! The arrogant, presumptuous Lieutenant Nicholas Poulain, surrounded by men without pride and ambition, as the burgess La

Chapelle Martel and his friends. Poulain! you are either a miracle—or you jest with us slyly!”

“Monseigneur cannot say that my apathy obstructs the duty I owe him and the League,” responded the lieutenant.

“Nor do I and my colleagues distrust either your industry or fidelity,” cried the duke; “but we know not your nature—you are never either pleased or displeased, angry or exhilarated—and men like us, working in secret to change the dynasty of a mighty empire, seek the reflection of our own policy in the face of every coadjutor, however humble his task.”

“My face I cannot change,” cried Poulain, with some animation, “but my hands, and if monseigneur will allow me to possess the treasure, my soul and its faculties are slaves to my will—and my will is obedience to the League.”

“By St. Hubert! the current of your speech improves in quality, good Nicholas,” exclaimed Guise. “But let us to business—and in few words. A shifting expediency has alone preserved our wicked and imbecile monarch on his throne, kept our holy church in bondage, and exposed us to the designs of atheistic Huguenots!—Should we hesitate in the means to crush its enemies? Would it not be lawful in so good a cause to oppose expediency to expediency—policy to policy—craft to craft—?”

“The holy fathers of St. Augustine believed so, when they forced the old Lombard on his death-bed to leave money for the repair of the tottering walls of their convent,” replied the lieutenant.

“Yes!” rejoined the duke, “and although old Peter the Lombard had bestowed on them much money in his life-time—a worthy, wealthy, and free-giving penitent, who washed away his yearly sins in showers of gold, yet the holy brethren forced him, even in death, to do an act of piety.”

“He had more masses than even he himself thought necessary for his soul,” said Nicholas.

“Poulain!” exclaimed Guise, with energy, “it was even so! He was made to benefit himself involuntarily. And thus would I force the League to the goal of success even beyond their natural pace. Has La Chapelle told you of the covenant which the Sixteen have signed? No! Then read!”

The lieutenant perused the declaration handed to him by the protector, who watched the quiet composed features of the official without discovering the least trace of surprise.

“They have quickened their steps, monseigneur,” remarked

Nicholas, when he had made an end of reading the covenant.

"Quickened—only?" cried the duke; "but I would have them march yet faster. What if *Notre Dame de Louvre* were to behold this parchment?"

"My worthy masters would be dragged to the Bastile," replied Poulain.

"And the citizens of Paris—?" asked the duke.

The lieutenant paused, as though at a loss for an answer. A slight flush overspread his face, and he at length replied—

"The Louvre might be besieged!"

"Ay! taken! cleared of its reptiles! The League triumphant! Valois in the dust! and the escutcheon of Lorraine charged with the golden lilies! Did I not tell you, good Nicholas, that the destiny of Paris, of the League, of myself, was in your hands?"

"By what act?" asked Poulain:—"Monseigneur speaks riddles."

"It is your duty, Nicholas," replied Guise, "to convey the report of the *Prevôt des Marchands* to the Louvre. How easily might this parchment be added to the labours of the worthy prévôt! Let it be carefully sealed up, and superscribed to her majesty, neither Villeroi, Revol, or Beaulieu would dare open it—or even were it perused by the secretaries—none would have the courage, or any, save Villeroi, who in his heart is with the Church, the inclination to suppress it."

"But how would this affect *Monsieur Le Prevôt*?" said Nicholas.

"Disguise nothing from me, Nicholas," replied the duke; "you mean rather, how would it affect *le Sieur Poulain*. I will tell you. The prévôt is one of the Sixteen, and the court would construe the discovery of this covenant among the functionary's papers as an accidental, yet most silly blunder of his. You would pass unsuspected, but *Monsieur Le Prevôt* would accompany his brethren to the Bastile. This, Nicholas, would be the signal for the bands of the League to rise with the unquenchable ardour of Frenchmen—Paris would be lost to the silly brother Henry—and the tenants of the Louvre have, perforce, in a short time, to surrender to me as protector and general of the League. Now! lieutenant! are you a humble, despised man; or are you one who holds in his hands the destinies of a kingdom?"

"*Monsieur Le Prevôt* must make his report of this day's agitation," answered the lieutenant, "and I pledge my life that the queen shall have this parchment."

Saying this, Nicholas with a trembling hand placed the parchment in his bosom, and bowing to the duke, withdrew; but he was instantly recalled.

"Why, Nicholas," exclaimed Guise, "you depart on this business as though you had merely received instructions to apprehend a felon. Here is a weighty comforter for the trifling danger you run—nay, take it!"

Poulain seemed somewhat loath to receive the proffered purse of gold which Lorraine offered.

"What, pride!" cried Guise, smiling; "so you affect gentility, Nicholas! But have no fear of staining your hands, my good lieutenant, though you were a baron by prescription. The descendants of Charlemagne's peers have no scruples with Valois."

As Nicholas had boasted of the strong sway which he exercised over his innate presumption and arrogance, it did not become his obscurity to enter into competition with the illustrious nobles of the French court: he took the gold meekly, and again withdrew from the presence of the protector.

Poulain did not return to La Chapelle, but went home, muttering to himself the while, "Catherine shall have the parchment—Catherine shall have the parchment." Arrived at his own dingy habitation, he exchanged the uniform of the municipal force for a doublet of an ordinary character; and taking with him the covenant of the League, departed on a pilgrimage, with his offering, to the shrine of our lady of the Louvre.

Though the open portals of the palace invited the presence of the humble functionary, yet he carefully avoided the public ingress, but sought and gained admittance into the Louvre by a more private entrance. He requested of the attendant that he might see Davila; and though of rank so lowly, his wish was quickly attended to, and the usher appeared. Davila nodded familiarly to the lieutenant, and the lieutenant returned the courtesy with equal freedom; this greeting performed, Nicholas followed his silent conductor up a back staircase, which terminated in a narrow vestibule. The usher disappeared by the only door visible—re-appeared after a short interval—beckoned to the lieutenant, who approached, passed through the doorway between the parted silk hangings beyond, and found himself in the magnificent cabinet of the queen-mother, and in the presence of Catherine herself.

"The news, Nicholas?" cried she, regarding Poulain with an eye which would fain anticipate a tardier communication.

"I hold the destinies of France in my own hands," replied the lieutenant, in his usual apathetic tone of voice.

The queen-mother, who was not averse to jocularly when it suited her condescension, exclaimed, "If so fortunate, you must have borne the burthen from your birth, for you have ever looked oppressed almost to death—but what new title has accrued to the chatelain of the Hotel de Poulain?"

"Your majesty and my friends have loaded me with enough already," replied the imboldened official; "am I not lieutenant of police, lackey to the Council of the League, citizen of Paris in right of my father, confidant to a great extent of the Duke of Guise, and faithful spy to the extent of my ability in the service of her majesty the Queen of France? These are the duties which prevent the free circulation of the blood through my veins!"

"Impudent and shrivelled wretch!" exclaimed Catherine to herself, as the lieutenant enumerated the catalogue of his avocations.

When political mines are about to be sprung by one party, and countermining is attempted by the other, inferior agents often play an important, though, perhaps, obscure part in the warfare of factions. Of this character was the employment of Nicholas Poulain; and whatever demerit attached to him as a spy, and however intrusive beyond ordinary endurance to his royal mistress, his unparalleled boldness, which her majesty having once encouraged, could not afterward repress, yet his defects were compensated by the fidelity with which he served the family of Valois, and the risk he ran in its service.

"Let me know the prompting of this mad humour of thine, good Nicholas!" uttered the queen, impatiently.

Poulain, who saw that the temper of the queen would not longer brook his trifling, proceeded to relate, with circumstantial minuteness, the alarm of the leaguers, the assembly at the Hotel de Guise, and the subscription to the covenant which he now produced, and placed in her majesty's hands, performing even more than his promise to the Duke of Guise.

Although in the presence of her menial, the queen could not refrain from giving vent to her stifling feelings. Her situation was most humiliating—treason at the palace gates, yet she durst not crush it—nay, could not—for what availed her army against the voice of the nation—against two religious factions which embraced nearly the whole community; the one, in its pretended zeal for the Catholic faith, undermining the throne, and boldly plotting in the capital; the other threatening to

kindle into a fresh rebellion the more distant provinces of the kingdom.

"Valois! thou hast destroyed all by thy insensate folly!" exclaimed she, while pacing her apartment. "Nothing will satisfy thy enemies but the throne itself! And yet, if destiny is not against us—if God's will is not written to our destruction, my son shall triumph yet! What have I not done for the Church? Have I not stifled every feeling of tenderness, and sacrificed peace, comfort, and sleep to advance its power? And now, behold the gratitude of its servants! Has not the blood of heresy flowed in torrents through yonder streets? And the ministers of that power for whose glory it was shed—Pshaw! those sorry priests are more akin to Satan than to God!"

Here she sat down exhausted with rage and indignation: calmer thoughts succeeded; she surveyed her position coolly, and began tracing her future course.

Poulain ventured to inquire what her majesty would do with the leaguers; and recommended that she should at once arrest the council, the protector, the monk Lincestre, and a score more of priests and nobles, and thus deprive the citizens of all their leaders and chiefs.

Catherine could scarce repress a smile as she glanced at the form from whence this advice proceeded.

"An unwise step," exclaimed she; "you only see one side of our position, lieutenant. Your news is precious beyond price, but the advice you proffer must not be acted on. When the citizens find, as they have by this time, that we are neither drowning nor slaying, they will re-open their shops. Avarice tells them that they must live, as they call it, and I thank Heaven that they are burthened with this log of necessity. Do you not remember what Guise told you? That the leaguers would fight if attacked. No no! by our lady of Loretto! Villeroi shall issue an ordinance, remitting for the present certain imposts which I will think of. The Protector of the League, as this paper designates the dangerous noble, shall be disarmed—or rather, he shall not be allowed to come within reach of a weapon. I must ask the secretary what tolls may be discontinued or commuted; and do you, Nicholas, continue at your post. Here is a trifling guerdon."

Catherine handed to the official a rouleau of gold from a cabinet drawer, and Nicholas departed from the presence with a reward far surpassing the gift of the protector.

CHAPTER IX.

Tout est fonde sur l'instabilité,
Rien ne se voit en ce monde qui dure,
Ores un chaud, ores une froidure.

PASQUIER.

THOUGH Valois lacked courage to oppose the imprisonment of Villa Franca, and Chicot stood too much in awe of the queen to excite her son, over whom he undoubtedly possessed great influence, into rebellion against her majesty's angry mandate, yet the king was resolved to lighten the rigour of his confinement, and after awhile, when his royal parent might be supposed to have forgotten the crime, to allow the prisoner his liberty.

Early on the morrow, Chicot presented himself at the gates of the Bastille with the king's order, and was admitted into the interior of that formidable fortress and royal prison. Dismounting from Trista Verita, whom he gave in charge to a sentinel, the jester sought the domicil of the governor, Monsieur Le Clerc.

Time had been, when monsieur and Le Clerc never met in juxtaposition, save jestingly or in irony ; but the governor was a child of fortune ; and talents more versatile than profound had been rewarded with prodigality. Originally a fencing-master, he had diverged from the theatre of arms to embrace in turn every profession which held out hopes of satisfying his vanity. His ambition was to shine—to glitter through an earthly career, with a brilliancy rivalling the glancing play of his own foil—power, and the possession of gold were but objects of secondary importance.

A well-formed person, features alternately expressive of haughtiness and servility, with an air of gentility acquired by an intercourse, though mercenary, with gentlemen in the exercise of his profession, were, however, the principal, nay, only points of brilliancy. Of low birth, he remained ignorant, though borne upward by fortune ; and the ease of address and deportment, which stood in place of scholarship, was rendered almost nugatory by the vestiges of its ambiguous character ; which striving to hide, by an overstrained condescension, only

shone out the more glaringly, and was oft succeeded by fits of his natural temperament, cruel, vehement, and derisive.

Checked and humiliated by the noblesse, he was thrown back to seek sympathy and companionship with his own class; and became a bitter foe to the circle into which he was denied ingress. With burgesses and stranger merchants, he however disdained to associate, till he found that his habits of servility and obsequiousness, which still marked his deportment, had made him a favourite with despised admirers. This discovery was flattering to his vanity; a sort of natural homage, unasked for, and therefore the more prized. He became a leader of the citizens, and as the citizens were growing into dangerous importance through the fostering care of Guise and the priesthood, Le Clerc was no longer a man to be contemned. From rude plebeian greetings and sociality, he occasionally turned a wistful eye to a higher sphere; and though repulsed as an associate, yet as an antagonist he had contrived, by more than one honourable deed of arms with the noblesse, — (the result of concerted encounter on his part, which through his habitual skill proved successful) to make himself formidable. He aimed at excelling the career of Bussi D'Amboise, a gentleman whose actions were imitative of Alcibiades, and who had recently fallen a victim to state-policy, after many a successful encounter, much regretted by the ladies of the court. But Bussi D'Amboise, though a favourite of the citizens, was a gentleman, a gallant of the Louvre; there was a wide gulf between him and his copyist, Le Clerc, the imitator of an imitator, the shadow of a shade.

But the influence of the *Sieur Le Clerc* increasing daily with the Parisians, Catherine, who had penetrated his aristocratic tendencies, foreseeing his dangerous importance as an ally of the Guise, resolved to make him her own. By creating the *maître d'armes* a gentleman, she was certain that she cut off all sympathy with the citizen-leaguers; at the same time that his plausible, versatile talents might be employed in retaining his influence with the class, and preventing much mischief. The subordinate post of deputy-governor of the Bastile, in which he had shown himself an apt scholar of his new mistress, was speedily vacated for the more important one of governor, in which he continued to display a useful activity in diverting the designs of the League.

To Monsieur Le Clerc, therefore, Chicot went on his errand of assuaging the sorrows of the ill-starred Villa Franca.

"Welcome home, Sir Chicot!" cried the governor, rising

from his chair of office, and bowing with an air which might be construed into either civility or derision, "I entertain my guests so nobly that they stop at nothing, not even murder or rebellion, to regain admittance. What little act have you done for an excuse to see me again? It was unkind of you, yesterday, when I had ordered a cell to be made ready for you in the *Tour de la Chapelle*, with a niche overlooking the gardens of the Faubourg, to run away—but repentance has come quickly, I see."

"Where is Monsieur Villa Franca?" cried the jester:—"I hold the king's mandate."

"Ah!" exclaimed the governor, "he is snugly lodged in the *Tour de la Liberté*. I hope, Monsieur Chicot, you have no design on his freedom. By our lady of succour, he has tasted no comfort yet."

"Monsieur Villa Franca is to have the liberty of the garrison on his *parole d'honneur*," replied Chicot, gravely; "he may go where he pleases, but conform to the hours observed in your faëry bower. And even if he should not return any one night, you are forbid making a report till forty-eight hours after; but should he come back within that time, your report must vanish into thin, empty air. There is the mandate, and look, it requests that you will make no report of having received it."

"Umph!" muttered Le Clerc. "Countersigned Beaulieu!—Why not Villeroi?"

"Ask his majesty," replied the jester; "but first conduct me to the *Tour de la Liberté*."

"I conduct a fool! Never!" exclaimed the indignant Le Clerc.

"I sympathize with you," retorted Chicot; "one fool is enough to show the way to—and being self-led, you cannot escape the yoke, except with loss of life."

"I am glad that this royal chateau," cried Le Clerc, sorry that the privilege of the histrionic artist protected him from a thrust of carte, or a bruised skin, "will be saved the pestilence of your society. I was afraid, when I first beheld you, that you had conceived a liking for the place."

"Then fall tears at once," said Chicot, "for the youth now in the *Tour de la Liberté* is my superior in my own profession. I own him master. Three kings have bidden for him. Treat him tenderly, or he will make you the very laughing-stock of the jailers. No one can pass the ordeal of his searching eye. He could turn even Messieurs D'Espéron

and De Joyeuse into mirth for their own lackeys. He could see through you with his eyes shut."

Le Clerc laid his hand on the hilt of his rapier, but after a moment's consideration, he desisted. Chicot, regardless of danger, strode towards the door, *au gouverneur*, and imitating the voice of Le Clerc, cried out, "Griffon! François! The keys of *La Liberté*!"

Angered as was the governor, the threat of the jester had taken effect; his vanity dreaded the scorching tongue of Villa Franca. With a man of his character the transition from haughtiness to servility was an unbroken, easy descent, a relaxation of muscle only,—no stiffness of the heart-strings.

"Monsieur Chicot," cried he, in a softened tone, "I am no match for you in your own art; but, to make amends, I will accompany you myself to *La Liberté*."

The Bastile consisted of eight towers, with intervening wards of equal strength with the bastions, and enclosed a quadrangular court, across which the consequential governor of the fortress now led the party-coloured jester, preceded by Griffon and François. As Colonel Grillon, at the instance of Valois, had requested of Le Clerc that the prisoner should be treated with distinction and lenity, Villa Franca had been consigned to an upper story of *La Liberté*, a tower overlooking the city. But in addition to the personal comfort accruing from the recommendation of the Swiss colonel, the traveller escaped the rigorous search which, under other circumstances, he would have been subjected to. His letters to the King of Navarre remained safe and undiscovered; and so long as these did not fall a prey to his enemies, and there rested a reasonable hope of intercourse with the imprisoned monarch, he cared not for the buffeting of adverse fortune.

The governor waited at the foot of the tower, while Chicot and the officers of the fortress proceeded to liberate the prisoner. During their absence, Le Clerc, who admired the influence of Chicot over the king, being desirous of gaining the good-will of Villa Franca, as a stepping stone to his own power, ordered a detachment to mount guard in the quadrangle, that he might receive, with due honour, the contested prize of three kings.

As the jester and his party emerged from beneath the narrow portal of the tower into the court-yard, they were surprised to discover the governor at the head of a corps of Swiss, and attended by a tambour, ensign, and the customary appurtenances of authority. Le Clerc, advancing from his station in front

of the line, saluted the prisoner with the most courteous respect.

"I am sorry, Monsieur Villa Franca," said he, "that I had not the pleasure of seeing you on your arrival here yesterday, at the citadel of Paris; had I been so fortunate, the mandate of his majesty, which I have received this morning by the hands of his most honoured jester, would have been unnecessary, as your appearance alone would have dictated my duty. But I trust, monsieur, that the recommendation of Colonel Grillon was construed most feelingly. The tower of *La Liberté* is a paradise to the cells beneath. His majesty's instructions, happily, will not deprive me of the delight I shall feel in cultivating the friendship of one so illustrious as yourself. With a regard for your welfare, he has commanded me to request you to honour this citadel every night with your presence, within the hour of closing the gates; and, lest the diffidence of youth and genius should unwittingly lead you to decline the invitation, I am instructed to require your parole of honour, that you will not seek to parry and exchange compliments with his majesty, by deprecating his proffered hospitality, but acquiesce in the royal will, and seek the friendly towers of the citadel when evening throws their long shadows over the city."

François and Grillon could scarcely refrain from open laughter on witnessing the effect of the governor's grandiloquence on the cunning jester, who knew the mind of Le Clerc too well not to attribute this unexpected display to the true cause. But Villa Franca, to whom the alternate violence and grotesque servility of the governor were not unknown, by report, answered in a befitting strain, the eulogistic greeting.

"*Monsieur le Gouverneur*," said he, "though I am but a stranger in Paris, you are not unknown to me by my fame; but I am at a loss to conceive how one so humble as myself should merit this honour from the governor of the citadel of Paris. His majesty, conscious of my innocence and of my loyalty, has exerted his royal will to alleviate the irksomeness of captivity; but my gratitude for this mercy is increased manifoldly by reflecting on the channel through which he has caused it to flow. In the remotest provinces of the kingdom, the name of Le Clerc is known as owned by a gentleman who joins the rarest personal qualities and accomplishments with a courage fitted to plunge into the depths of political contest, and to soar in the gay firmament of the court."

"You speak too nobly of my poor career," cried the self-

satisfied governor ; " praise in one who is accustomed to spare neither prince nor peasant-slave, and to utter unwelcome truths to kings, is indeed flattering."

Spare neither prince nor peasant-slave ! Utters unwelcome truths to kings ! What means this, master of the rapier ? thought the astonished Villa Franca, who had up to this moment believed that the respect of the governor proceeded from the nature of the king's command. I have, indeed, spoken to more than one sovereign prince in no humble terms, and hope to be as free with another ere long. But he knows me not, or I should have been consigned to the dungeons beneath *La Liberté*.

" *Monsieur le Gouverneur*," cried he aloud, " you mistake me for a man of illustrious rank. I am but a humble prisoner under your charge."

" Pardon me, monsieur," replied Le Clerc, " I am not in error. Your power is greater than that which springs from Montjoie and his brother-heralds. The whole court must tremble beneath the withering effects of your anger if you take offence ; and though you may be subjected through your freedom to an occasional sojourn in an abode like your present, yet there are other monarchs who would be glad of your making their court a refuge."

Villa Franca, in amazement, cast a glance at Chicot, and from the aspect of his grave features, teeming with mischief, came at once to the conclusion, that the jester had been practising on the credulity of the governor—an example which he resolved to follow.

" I am unconscious of deserving your encomiums, monsieur," replied the young man ; " I have not been in Paris two days !"

" If you had been here longer, I should have known it," said Le Clerc, smiling ; " the arrival of strangers is never concealed from me. You came on purpose to visit his majesty—"

Villa Franca started at this announcement—a movement which the governor remarked.

" I solicit your pardon, monsieur," continued Le Clerc ; " it is not over-courteous in his majesty to send his guests to my care—but I recommend, with all respect for your wisdom, that you will not entertain the proposals of other monarchs, because of a trifling difference with the illustrious Valois."

" It is a great happiness for me," cried Villa Franca, addressing the governor, " thus to hold converse with a gentle-

man whose reputation, borne to my ears on the wings of fame, even to the shores of the Mediterranean, I never expected to have communion with. Many are the bright heroes of antiquity to whom I have heard monsieur compared ; but there is one of modern days, to whose qualities of mind and body those of the governor of the Bastille might be honourably compared. Ah ! monsieur ! you smile : it cannot be concealed from you, that I allude to the gallant Bussi D'Amboise."

"*Mon Dieu !*" muttered Chicot to himself ; "if this ex-leaguer should suspect that the youth is laughing at him, he would go back to his old friend Guise, rather than sleep without his revenge."

"The name of Bussi D'Amboise," exclaimed the elated governor, "has become proverbial. It is associated with courage, magnanimity, and an independence which mocked the designs of enemies."

"And why should not he who follows in the steps of the renowned D'Amboise," asked Villa Franca, "take also his name ? There are many precedents for an adoption, both in ancient and modern times. And, in an after age, Bussi Le Clerc would be as celebrated as his model, Bussi D'Amboise."

"Bussi Le Clerc ! Le Clerc Bussi ! I know not which to prefer," uttered the jester aloud.

"But should I not be deemed presumptuous ?" said Le Clerc, hesitatingly.

"What ! and do you not deem it presumptuous to imitate the noble actions of the gallant Bussi ?" cried Villa Franca ; "then why shrink from the possession of the name ? Where sleeps the valour of Le Clerc ?"

"Her mejesty would confirm the addition by patent," said Chicot.

"Ah ! but Monsieur Le Clerc—may I not add, Bussi ?"—exclaimed the traveller ; "is a gentleman so independent in his actions, and so original in his ideas, that he would scorn to receive that as a gift which should be assumed through a natural sympathy in unison with the genius of its former possessor !"

"I am convinced," exclaimed Le Clerc, "but I have not yet performed my duty. You see around you, monsieur, the towers of the citadel. They are quite at your service. If you prefer a lodging overlooking the city and the court, there is *La Tour Du Puits* ; or *De la Bassiniere*, still more agreeable, commanding a glimpse of the Hotel De Guise and its gardens. If

you be pastorally inclined, like a poet, and fond of trees, there is *La Chapelle*, or *Du Trésor*, where I lock up all who have the reputation of being miserly; but commend me to *De la Comté*. Its name bespeaks refinement and ease! It abounds in comfort; and you may see the plain of Ivry from the upper story! An extensive plain, monsieur, is a pleasing view for a prisoner."

"Ah! monsieur! you load me with obligation—"

"Far from it," exclaimed the governor, hastily interrupting the prisoner; "you shall dwell with me in the governor's house. But step aside, monsieur, you can do me a trifling service."

"It will be the study of my life," replied Villa Franca, walking away with him from within hearing of the group.

"I know the power you will exercise at the Louvre, if you condescend to remain there after your liberation from my charge," said Le Clerc, looking earnestly at the young man: "I have enemies in that quarter—vain, frivolous creatures, who dispute my right to mix in their society, because, forsooth, I taught several of them the only talent they possess! Crush these butterflies, monsieur, and I remain your eternal debtor! A few lightning glances of your potent wit would destroy them beyond re-animation. Speak well of me. Let my name be uttered complacently in the Louvre, and you will benefit a man who may do you service in time of need! Yonder factious citizens were my comrades once, and they still respect their old companion. Le Clerc may be one day a pass-word of safety."

"We will be friends!" exclaimed Villa Franca, returning the searching glance of the governor.

And, from that hour, both prisoner and chief jailer continued on the most intimate terms of sociality—the former being domiciled in the luxurious quarters of the governor, surpassing, beyond compare, the best dormitory in either *Du Trésor* or *La Comté*. Through Le Clerc, and Chicot, who visited the Bastille daily, ever with assurance of speedy release, Villa Franca gleaned the history of the faction which had arrayed itself against the court; yet always intent on prosecuting his secret object of conferring with the imprisoned monarch of the Louvre;—an object which he discovered to be surrounded with difficulties, now that he had no longer access to the palace. In pursuit of this design, he could trust no confidant; and although at large, till, as Le Clerc expressed it, the shadow of the Bastille was flung on the city, yet the only restriction on his movements was most fatal to his wishes;—he was forbidden, by the timorous Valois, from approaching the Louvre, lest he should be seen

by its angered mistress. Hope, however, increased in strength daily.

Each one has his part to play; and that allotted to Villa Franca was not more dangerous than the career of Nicholas Poulain. After the interview with Catherine already detailed, he returned to his double duty of active service to the League, and watchfulness for the court. On the day following, the report of the *Prevôt des Marchands* was transmitted through his hands; another day beamed on the leaguers, and was passed by Guise in expectation of witnessing the explosion of her majesty's anger: but no such wished-for event occurred. Nicholas was examined and re-examined, both by the duke and Lincestre, and by the closeness of his narration, left no doubt on their minds that Catherine had received the covenant. Day followed day with the same quietude and repose; and the crafty protector suspected that the queen-mother had looked at the question at issue in the same light as himself.

Poulain watched their uneasy chagrined air, and secretly delighted in their mortification; but he was not slow in perceiving that they were planning afresh some subtle snare, of which, however, he remained ignorant.

On the eve of the day appointed for the installation of the knights of the Holy Ghost, Nicholas was in attendance at the Hotel de Guise; he was summoned into the presence of the protector.

"Nicholas!" said the duke, "I purpose riding to St. Denis this evening. Our friends muster there to-night, and you must accompany me. As your cousin is *prevôt*, we may need your influence with him."

This was good news to the spy, as he expected to learn the details of the plot. The protector then gave him a letter to convey to the Chevalier D'Aumale at the convent of the Dominicans in the *Rue St. Jacques*; from which place he was to return with an answer, or accompanied by the chevalier.

"There is a conference at the convent," said Guise, in dismissing him. "Our friends the monks have a scheme in agitation to complete the affairs of the League, and planned by them without my active participation. A leader must, at certain seasons, consent to delegate his supremacy."

"Be it so!" said Nicholas to himself, as he left the hotel:—"I shall know all by to-morrow."

On arriving at the convent, he was denied admittance to the chevalier, and forced to wait alone in the vestibule, having surrendered his letter to one of the brethren.

"Umph! the monks are agitating!" muttered the spy as he sat down on the bench; "But why should not I be present?"

He heard a murmuring of voices in the room where D'Aumale was closeted with the brethren. The doorway leading into the garden of the convent was open: and it immediately crossed his mind, that the window of the chamber of conference was easily approachable. His curiosity being excited, he watched the opportunity (nor, indeed, was there much risk, as the vestibule was deserted), and stole unperceived into the garden—there was no one there—and he cautiously approached the window. It was too lofty for him to see within, but the casement being open, he could hear distinctly, and to escape observation, he crouched close to the buttress.

He had not listened long ere he felt quite horror-struck at the nature of the meditated plot. Lincestre and D'Aumale were apparently soothing the impatience of a monk, who repeatedly demanded the consecrated steel, that he might rush into the Louvre, and kill the most idolatrous of kings. "Not to-night!" It must not be, Jacques!" cried a voice which the spy recognised as that of Lincestre:—"wait till to-morrow! To-morrow the impious man walks in sackcloth with his brother hypocrites. Let it be his last act of hypocrisy."

Jacques seemed much discontented with this restriction on his regicidal ardour; and walked away from the vicinity of the window, muttering an unintelligible rhapsody.

"My cousin has sent Poulain to tell me that he has prepared every thing for leaving Paris to-night," said D'Aumale. "It will work favourably for us with the scrupulous-minded, that we should be absent while Jacques administers his sacrament of steel! Keep him fastened till the appointed hour; then let loose your blood-hound on the scent!"

"*Mon Dieu!*" murmured Nicholas.

"Inspiration, my son," replied the monk, "is but a blind power without a guide! we must control it. Bolts and guards shall hold Jacques fast, till Valois presents himself at the door of the Augustine's church—we shall prepare a fall for the pride of these brethren—and then—our petition will open the way to brother Jacques! Commend me to the protector!"

"To the devil!" said Nicholas, escaping from his nook. "If I can but reach the outer-door, Valois is safe. They will fancy that I was tired of waiting, and I will rejoin the chevalier at the Hotel de Guise."

In pursuance of this resolve, Poulain hastily retraced his steps—he gained the vestibule—the portal was close at hand

—but suddenly the door of the conference-chamber opened, and the spy had scarcely time to throw himself on the bench, and feign sleep.

“Poulain!” shouted the chevalier. Nicholas started up. “Your dull dreamy head,” continued D'Aumale, “would suit the brotherhood excellently.”

“I should not like the duties, monsieur!” answered the lieutenant, who in the absence of all real sympathy of companionship and sociality with those in whose company or service he spent a great portion of his time, indulged in jokes, of which he alone understood the point.

“It may be so,” rejoined D'Aumale; “but we have not a moment to spare. We must haste to the hotel.”

“Let me have but a few minutes to reach my own hotel!” cried the bewildered lieutenant, more pointedly than ordinarily.

“Ah! Nicholas!” exclaimed the chevalier, laughing, and seizing the arm of the reluctant functionary of the League; “The Hotel de Poulain, as you name it, must not joy in the presence of its seigneur till you return from St. Denis.”

To have dashed aside the chevalier, and fled, would have been betraying himself a traitor to the League—a feat which must have sank for ever the star of Poulain ere the light of another morn. There was no alternative but to accompany D'Aumale.

Arrived at the Hotel de Guise, they found the duke and a few followers mounted for the journey. This was a hopeless prospect for Poulain, and his distress was complete when he beheld two horses ready caparisoned.

“Chevalier!” cried the protector, “we have no time to lose—there will be no delay at the barrier, as the officer has received instructions for our passage. And you, lieutenant,” added he, addressing Nicholas, “must be taught your lesson as we ride.”

“Monseigneur!” exclaimed the spy, without attempting even to put foot in the stirrup.

“Poulain!” said D'Aumale, coming behind, as Nicholas fancied, to throw him into his seat,—but the chevalier, without resorting to that extreme expedient, whispered in his ear, in a low earnest voice, “you must negotiate with your cousin on secret matters which to-morrow will evolve—we require your assistance, as we know not his temper—we may make St. Denis a *point d'appui*—but more of this to-night. The protector will have cause to send you back to Paris to-morrow morning—no one will be alarmed at your absence!”

Nicholas, finding obstinacy useless, made no further demur, but mounted, and left the city with the duke and his suite.

"What a struggle the devil is making for the advancement of his favourite," thought the spy:—"he shall be defeated yet!"

CHAPTER X.

1st Citizen.—First, you know, Caius Marcius is the chief enemy to the people.

All.—We know't, we know't.

1st Citizen.—Let us kill him, and we'll have corn at our own price.

CORIOLANUS.

THE day had now arrived destined to give birth to the noblest order of Christian knighthood. While Catherine looked complacently at the experiment about to be tried on the latent loyalty of the French noblesse, Valois beheld with rapture the fruition of his unwearied labours in perfecting the costume, and arranging the laws of the incipient institution. The end was forgotten in the means; the eye of the monarch revelled in the prepared display of velvet and silk, heron-plumage, and cloth of silver—not forgetting the mantelets of green mohair,—till the politic design of the order was buried beneath its gorgeous trappings. But the busy sentiment inherent in man, and which the Christian faith tends to strengthen into a duty, whispering words of warning in the midst of the greatest happiness, was not idle in the breast of the devotional Valois. That the Power which bestows every blessing might not, in displeasure at the vain delight of the monarch, change his joy into sorrow, he strove to divert this adumbration of ill by a public profession of humility;—a penitential procession of the king and his courtly brotherhood to the Cathedral of Notre Dame, previous to the assumption of the gay robes of the illustrious order of the Holy Ghost.

Behold, then, for a single day, Paris has thrown aside its open discontent, and wears the garb of festivity! The streets are crowded with ladies and gallants, hastening to the magnificent church of the monks of St. Augustine; citizens and their families jostling each other on the like intent, or loitering

in the line of march, to witness the spectacle of the royal monk, and his noble and humble brethren.

The Louvre throws open its gates, and the gaping crowd press forward to behold their monarch. No clang of trumpets, no prancing of war-steeds, banishes from the memory of the peasant the discontent of poverty ! A single file of brethren issue from the gates of the palace, and it is known that Valois has entrusted himself, without guards, to the mercy of a populace, taught to detest him and his sway. The identity of the penitents was concealed by a dress as fantastic as ungainly. It consisted of a white robe of holland cloth in the shape of a sack, with two holes for the wearer to distinguish his path ; long sleeves, and a high pointed hood. To this habit was attached a discipline of cord, to mark the penitential condition ; and for badge, a cross of white satin on a ground of yellow velvet.

It was an anxious sight for the friends of the brethren, to witness their progress through the tardily-opening avenue made by the mass of people which lined the streets ; but in spite of the danger of mixing with enemies, open or concealed, and of exposure to the no less dangerous enmity of the monks, there were but few troops present to preserve order :—Valois, trusting to his sacred purpose for forbearance, contrary to a promise exacted by the queen-mother, who had previously departed, in great state, accompanied by her ladies, for the church of the Augustines.

Violence, in an individual or collective form, seemed only prevented by the humour of the bystanders, whose excited feelings found a vent in jokes and jeers not inaudible to the ear of royalty. There was something so ludicrous in the whole affair—such an incongruity between the object desired and the means proposed—such a resemblance to a troop of jugglers and mummers, that a sense of ridicule overcame darker sentiments ; and in all probability, the obsequious courtiers owed their lives to the absurdity of their proceedings.

We need not describe the genuflexions before the altar of Notre Dame, nor have we space for the prayers of the monarch and his hooded train. After emerging from the sacred edifice, the line of penitents continued its progress from *L'Isle du Palais* by the bridge connecting it with the left bank of the Seine, till they reached the convent of the monks of St. Augustine, in the *Rue des Augustins*, and hard by the quay of the same name.

In spite of the general defection of the monastic orders, Catherine had contrived to keep the Augustine brotherhood to a sense of loyalty ; and there were many reasons which rendered the connexion desirable both to the court and the monks. *Les Grands Augustins*, as they were called, to distinguish them from the bare-footed, and other sects, were in possession of a convent which, in addition to its famed church, boasted the most magnificent hall in Paris, which had been often used for assemblies of the estates of the kingdom, inauguration of sovereigns, and other occasions of imposing and national character. It cannot, therefore, be a source of wonder, that they ventured to incur the displeasure of the leagued orders, by associating their convent with the new institution of knighthood.

Happily for Valois, his disloyal subjects did not deprive him of the heartfelt pleasure which attended his beholding the interior of the church. After emerging like a chrysalis from his sack in the chapel *Du Saint Esprit*, consecrated to the use of, and now first appropriated to the order, and which De Biron, who witnessed the disrobing, called the chamber of Beatification, from some remote resemblance between this act and the escape of the chrysalis skyward, the monarch proceeded to array himself in the apparel in which he had been heretofore discovered by Villa Franca arguing with Amiot.

Thus decorated, he walked to the choir of the church, and seated himself, with due ceremony, on a raised throne, amid the acclamations of the assembled spectators. Daylight had been carefully excluded from the sacred edifice, around which were galleries filled with the ladies of the court, nobles not in office, and the foreign envoys ; an assemblage, whose rich apparel and decorative jewels reflected the light of an artificial day. Chairs of state near his majesty were occupied by the queen-mother, her fair daughter Margaret of Navarre, the Bourbon captive, who performed the duties of grand-master of the palace, in the absence of the Duke of Guise, who had sent an excuse of sudden illness the day previous, and retired into the country ; the Duke D'Alençon ; and the princes of lesser note.

None but his majesty was apparelled in the full habit of the order. The novitiates were severally introduced, and conducted to the foot of the throne in their novitiate dress ; and after performing homage, were invested with the insignia *Du Saint Esprit*, by Amiot and his associates. The ceremony was long and imposing, and undisturbed by any untoward

event, save a solitary laugh from Chicot, who stood beyond the space wherein the installation was made, and who, after this uncalled-for ebullition, retired behind the front spectators to converse more leisurely with his companion. A long homily from the legate, Caiëtano, closed the ritual, and permitted the spectators to gaze without fear of spiritual loss on the store of bright eyes which gleamed from the galleries, more brilliant than the many lustres which shed a refulgent glow on all around. This being over, her majesty and the ladies withdrew.

The reception of petitions in the present era is reserved for the occasion of levees and formal state audiences; but the monarchs of the house of Valois were accustomed to set apart for this purpose, hours and seasons which, by the taste of the nineteenth century, would be deemed *bizarre* and impracticable.

It had been notified many days previously, that his majesty, in gratitude for the consummation of his ardent wishes in the institution *Du Saint Esprit*, would receive the petitions of his poorer subjects, and minister to their necessities at the door of the church of the St. Augustines, after the installation.

Previous to this act of kingly charity, and while the congregation were slowly egressing from the church, Valois retired with the King of Navarre to the chapel *Du Saint Esprit*, to recover from his fatigue ere he encountered the army of petitioners and mendicants awaiting his presence. He had not forgotten the absurd interruption of Chicot, and gave orders for the appearance of the jester, to account for his ill-timed mirth. Our friend of the parti-coloured legs pleaded in excuse the conduct of Monsieur Villa Franca, which moved him irresistibly.

"Ah! that Marseillois!" said the king, aside to Chicot, "mischief will surely happen to him, or through him! Why does he not escape? Has he no dread of her majesty's anger?"

"Why does he not escape?" replied the jester. "Ah! there lies the misfortune of being a gentleman. He has given his parole of honour. Poor young man! his fortune is marred enough already by the absurd prejudices of birth preventing him from becoming my successor in your majesty's favour."

"It cannot be helped, Chicot," replied Valois, in the same low tone of voice, to avoid being overheard, "the privilege of becoming a fool extends only to a certain rank,—all above are excluded under pain of infamy. But what did Villa Franca say in the church?"

"He was constantly urging me to beckon aside the King of Navarre," answered the jester.

"And for what purpose? But speak low or our cousin will hear," said the monarch.

"That he might engage him in private talk while I pinned my cap to the back of his mantle," replied Chicot.

"Impossible!" exclaimed the king.

"So I told him," uttered the jester. "But see, there is the Marshal de Biron and little Amiot at the door, with his thin chalk-coloured legs, and rosettes as large as cauliflowers! The good people without, monks and mendicants, must be very impatient. I much approve of your majesty's taste: these acts of charity will create a desire to appreciate the brethren's goodly banquet. More than once, while in the church, I fancied that the exhalation of the incense was mixed with fumes, as divine, from the convent kitchen."

When Valois appeared at the door of the church, the space in front was choked with people in every variety of dress and condition. All classes were congregated;—the citizen, the beggar, and the bare-headed monk, mingled with the soldier, and the gayly-dressed gentleman, whose plume waved above the caps of his humbler companions. Near the door were a crowd of poor lay suppliants with petitions,—beggars and mendicant friars anticipating alms,—both classes awaiting to share the bounty accorded by the monarch on such occasions.

The appearance of this group was strikingly contrasted with the gay attire of the king, his cousin Navarre, who attended him in his delegated office of grand-master of the palace, the Marshal de Biron, who kept an eye upon the Bourbon prince, and the officers of the household;—these last holding the coffers which contained the money destined to the purpose of alms.

Distinguishable in the crowd of suppliants were three Dominicans, whose appearance there excited observation, as it was imagined that the wealthy brethren of the *Rue St. Jacques* would have scorned appeal to him whom they had denounced as imbecile in policy and an enemy to the Catholic faith; but otherwise, their position was in keeping with the monastic character as evinced towards Valois, of courting his preferments and bounty, and joining in the League to his destruction. The two outer monks were seen ever and anon whispering to their brother, whom they kept between them, and who had a wild unsteady look, and seemed to pay but little attention to

what they said ; his eye wandered everywhere without appearing to rest on any particular object.

Their turn having at length arrived to address his majesty, all three simultaneously presented themselves before him. The monk on the right hand drew forth a petition which he handed to Valois, and which he informed his majesty prayed for assistance in repairing the church of the convent. The king assured the speaker that the matter should be submitted to the royal council ; that as they had chosen the present season to make known their wants, he could only assist them after the mode observed with the mendicant brethren ; and thereupon handed them money, which they took hurriedly, and immediately moved aside to make way for other suppliants. But instead of retiring, they wheeled round behind his majesty and the officers of the household, as though they intended entering the church. When between the king and the porch of the sacred edifice, they stopped—turned round—and the middle monk, drawing a poniard from his robe, was about to strike at his majesty, when, at the same moment, a stranger rushing forward from the church, caught the uplifted arm of the assassin, and threw him backward.

A momentary struggle ensued, in which the two monks rescued their companion, and escaped with him into the church, before the attendants of Valois, busily assisting him in administering to his subjects' wants, knew the nature of the disturbance. De Biron alone was sensible of the frustrated attempt, and seeing that his master had escaped, whispered the confused monarch to continue his charitable avocations ; and turning, beheld in the person of the rescuer his young acquaintance, Villa Franca, who having been unsuccessful in gaining the ear of Navarre in the church, lingered in the hope of succeeding in his object while the royal train stood engaged with the suppliants ;—and was just on the point of essaying boldly to detach his captive majesty from the group of ministrants, when the Dominican raised the consecrated steel to his own discomfiture.

Thus, by a mysterious chain of circumstances, was the act of the protector in leaving the city made subservient to the frustration of his dearest hope ! While the meditated design of the nightly tenant of the Bastile, though aimed at the authority of the king, was the means of preserving his life !

The marshal staid not to thank the young man, but commanding several of the attendants into the church, commenced an active search, assisted by Villa Franca. But all in vain.

They were nowhere to be found; indeed, the other portal having been flung open to allow egress to the spectators of the installation, without displacing the crowd of mendicants at the principal entrance, offered an easy flight.

The service of charity being over, Valois and his friends returned into the church, to inquire of the marshal the cause of the struggle. Although excessively enraged at the result of the search, De Biron had too much sagacity to promulgate a truth so fatal to the security of his master. He replied, that seeing the monks about to intrude on the privacy of their rivals the Augustines, and dreading an inquisitorial ramble over the chapel *Du Saint Esprit*, he made signs to Monsieur Villa Franca, who was fortunately within the porch, to stay their progress—that a scuffle ensued—and the holy brethren had forced the pass and disappeared.

"How is this, monsieur?" cried Valois, affecting surprise on beholding the Marseillois; "I thought her majesty had restricted your adventures within a narrow compass."

"I am indebted to the noble and courteous governor of the Bastille for this indulgence," replied Villa Franca; "Monsieur Le Clerc sympathized with my earnest desire of seeing your majesty consummate the glory of an illustrious reign. I am still a prisoner on parole—but am so dazzled with light—that I know not what will be the effect of coming again in contact with those dark walls!"

"*Pauvre enfant!*" cried Chicot, "he shrinks from an upper story of *La Comté!*"

"I will see if your contrition will not conciliate our good parent!" said Valois, kindly.

Meanwhile, De Biron, impatient to confer with his majesty, beheld with alarm the approach of the sacristan, who entered the sacred edifice by a private door from the convent, and invited the king, in the name of the brethren, to join them in the hall, and partake of their frugal fare!

"Frugal fare!" exclaimed Chicot, loud enough to disconcert the messenger; "its perfume is sweeter than frankincense!"

"Request the King of Navarre to receive the brethren," whispered the marshal to Valois; "Villa Franca and myself have a secret to impart!"

The king looked at the marshal in alarm—a glance was exchanged which caused his majesty to tremble with apprehension; but summoning his courage, he signified his wishes to the Bourbon, who departed, accompanied by all save De Biron,

Villa Franca, and the jester, who, however, kept out of hearing.

When the particulars of the frustrated attempt were narrated to him, the unhappy monarch gave vent to a torrent of lamentations on the ingratitude of the priesthood ; there was not a convent in Paris that had not, in one reign or another, been founded or rebuilt by an ancestor of their intended victim.

"What will satisfy them?" cried the despairing king. "If I were to throw crown, sceptre, palace, robes, kindred, and friends into the pit of their voracious appetite, would it be filled up? Alas!—no: it yawns upon me, a dark bottomless gulf which would entomb a world!"

With a mind alternately possessed by anguish, indignation, and anger, the agitated monarch paced the choir of the noble edifice, which had so lately witnessed a happy sovereign surrounded by joyful subjects. He looked at the vacant spaces,—the suspended galleries bereft of their splendour,—and sighed at the desolation of his own heart. His eye glanced on the party-coloured dress of Chicot in the distance, and he laughed at the bitter mockery. There was no hope there. But there was De Biron on the other side, the faithful counsellor and friend; Villa Franca, who had done him good service. Despair retreated from its vantage-post—humanity glowed again within him—and he prayed silently for relief.

The sacristan again appeared. The marshal repeated the message, that the banquet was prepared and the guests waiting.

"It is my command that they sit down without me," cried the monarch, firmly. "Let Navarre be my deputy—they will still have a king to dine with them. Say that I have received despatches of the utmost moment."

After this effort, Valois relaxed into a melancholy fit, which neither the care of De Biron or the Marseillois could remove. It was not so much the reflection on the danger incurred, as the idea that he would be subjected to fresh attacks, which overpowered the monarch. He who falls unexpectedly beneath the assassin's steel, may be esteemed happy compared with him who lives in apprehension of it.

"Her majesty will not be sparing of reproof," said the marshal, "of the temerity of the unguarded procession."

"I did indeed promise," replied the king, "not to venture through the streets without the Swiss or the guard of the *Bec Du Corbin*. The Dominicans might have attacked me as I passed along with more success. But it will teach me caution

for the future—future ! did I say ? How long have I to live, De Biron ? The next attempt may find me without a Villa Franca. Marshal ! I will go to Grandmontans to-morrow. It is a calmer and holier place than this rude city—and I feel sick at heart !”

“Sick at heart !” cried the jester, coming forward, “no wonder. Your majesty has had no dinner—and the installation was a long famishing ceremony. Hear the merry notes of the brave Augustines—they would find Grandmontans very dull.”

The brethren and the monks were indeed very brave, as Chicot expressed it, in their revelry ; the shouting was loud and vehement.

“By St. Michael !” exclaimed the king, “what can this mean ? *Les Grands Augustins* and myself are good friends. They coveted the honour of associating their convent with *Du Saint Esprit*, and my honoured parent was happy to attach, at least, one monastic order to the interests of the court. But we must stay this clamour, or Lincestre and his fellow-preachers will denounce us from the pulpit as the corrupters of the holy brethren !”

“We might fancy ourselves in the sutlers’ quarters during a truce,” cried De Biron.

“I will stop this ill-seasoned mirth,” said the king, leaving the church by the door opening into the convent.

The corridor terminated at the entrance to the refectory. Valois was about to enter, but hearing the voice of his favourite, the Duke D’Espernon, he paused to listen. Chicot advanced beyond his majesty, and, unseen by the guests, gained a fair view of the interior, which resembled one of those vast halls described in the tales of old romance, the abode of some giant or subtle magician, and where the weary knight-errant, after a day of peril and fatigue, sought repose, unconscious of the snares of his host. Above, the tracery of the dusky roof was scarcely distinguishable ; but below, the many lustres shed a glowing light over the joyous company, and sparkled on the golden vessels and flagons which the Louvre had afforded to the, so called, mendicant brethren.

The alternation of shaven crown and dusky robe, with the flowing locks and dazzling habit of the novitiate chivalry, presented a striking contrast to the secret spectator ; but the spirit which animated both monk and chevalier sprung from the same sentiment—an entire resignation to the pleasures of conviviality.

"I accept the challenge, holy fathers," reiterated D'Espéron, rising from his seat, "but I fear Monsieur De Joyeuse has done unwisely to select me as a proof that the eloquence of Grandmontans is superior to the oratory of *Les Grands Augustins*."

When Chicot heard this speech, his stony eyes emitted scintillations of fire expressive of extreme delight. He turned round to Valois, and whispered in an earnest tone—

"*Mon Dieu!* See the fruits of your majesty's discipline! Brother Jean is about to prove himself a better preacher than the best of the Augustine brotherhood."

"It is a profane display, unworthy of D'Espéron!" uttered the king:—"I will interdict it! Why sits Navarre so tamely—and of the reformed faith too!"

The jester threw himself into a posture of genuflexion, and embracing the knees of his majesty, as much to prevent the threatened movement as in evidence of supplication, besought Valois to listen, and demean himself quietly, as became a good king at a sermon.

De Biron and Villa Franca ventured to peep into the hall. They beheld the duke casting his eyes slowly round the assembly, seemingly to allow time to gather ideas of theology, probably much scattered by the fumes of the brethren's wine, which was not like the vessels, a present from the court. He commenced by remarking that every theme of morality and religion had been exhausted; that the preachers, whether Dominican, Augustine, the order of Loyola, or the ordained clergy, told the same tale—repeated the same incentives to good works—and yet the age remained as bad as ever.

"They charge us," continued he, "with neglecting attendance on their sermons,—staying away from their homilies—congregating in a court where beauty is worshipped to the exclusion of religion. Alas! these preachers are blind—the gaudy, ill-featured statue of the Virgin may be agreeable to the rude eyes of peasants, but can never stimulate us to devotion. Let them not confound us with those to whom even painted wood must, perforce, be more divine, than the skins of the much-seasoned, sun-burnt virgins with whom they are in daily converse!"

Murmurs of applause, both from monk and knight, followed this rhapsody.

"We worship neither stock nor stones," continued the enthusiastic preacher; "neither the workmanship of Flanders nor of Milan—but at the living fount of beauty. We breathe

devotion to a breathing virgin—we see heaven in her smiles—and throw ourselves lowly at her feet in all humility!”

“I never taught him this!” cried Valois.

“Do not disturb the congregation!” murmured Chicot, imploringly.

“Our holy instructors say,” continued the duke, “that these are sensual feelings; that they are of the earth on which we tread. Yet how many of our brave ancestors, dying on the well-fought field, have mingled the thoughts of the Giver of life with sighs for a fair damsel of Provence or Auvergne! Is this sensuality? Is it not looking up to Heaven through Heaven’s works? Did I not hear but just now one of the holy brothers, whose guest I now am, and whose glance now meets mine—”

A burst of laughter for a moment interrupted the preacher.

“Did he not dilate on the diminutive elegance of a well-moulded foot? Was it the earthly flesh and blood which moved the brother’s enthusiasm, or was it the grace of motion—and be it not forgotten,—grace of motion can spring only from a graceful mind! We worship the grace of mind! But no where can we behold in this life pure spirituality! all is clothed in flesh and earth. Yet each of us has a mind capable of seeing the workings of the soul in the grace with which it animates our dull clay.”

“Ah! this is better!” said Valois, more contented to listen. Chicot, however, was still kneeling, and kept a sharp watch on the motions of his liege.

“Would not the holy fathers,” added the preacher, “gain more by addressing to us arguments inappropriate to ruder congregations? What might not a preacher do with these powerful weapons? Would he not be worthy of the low-crowned hat, or even towering tiara, if with a tongue of skill he detected the virtues as they lie hid—or displayed in open alluringness—in the breathing works of creation? But this morning the legate spoke to us of the awful sublimity of the stupendous mountains which hem in the northern plains of India! Let us look nearer home! How much more should we have felt our own insignificance, had my lord-cardinal described, in one of her dark fits, our fair sovereign, *Notre Dame de Louvre*, frowning on her court! What is the lowering precipice to the clouding brow and lightning-flashing eye of a woman in the pride of her anger and her power! Does the black rock threaten to entomb us with its overhanging wrath, we fly—and out of danger, laugh at its threatening aspect!

But when the fair majesty of Notre Dame is clouded dark as night, we are in dread and despair—but fascinated, fly not—prostrating ourselves, we prefer death to banishment !”

The applause of the knights re-echoed the sentiment.

“These are the influences to which we are subject,” cried the duke ; “these are the engines which move our souls to good or evil ! Our saintly advisers know not our hearts. All, save *Les Grands Augustins*, whose praise I forbear to repeat in their presence, have drawn a veil of darkness over the land ! They have forced us to crowd around our beloved king and his royal parent, like a faithful band, to shield and protect them. Let us cherish these feelings, which elevate us above the brute herd of peasants and citizens ; which make us in love with grace and beauty, and abhor the blood-seeking Guise and his bigoted crew ! Let us, in a city, where stalk rudeness and murder—”

A thrill of horror, perceptible even to Chicot, ran through the nerves of the monarch at this allusion, imaginary, yet so lately verified, of the duke.

—“Live secluded and apart ! But if our mild policy fail, we will, on the plains of our native France, rally round our king ; and, amid the shouts of *Montjoie St. Denis*, bear him onward in triumph—”

The preacher was proceeding in his metaphor, but the enthusiasm which had gradually possessed his own fancy, imparting itself to the sympathizing audience, they arose in a tumult of delight, and made the roof re-echo their shouts.

Valois could no longer remain a silent auditor, but deeply impressed alike with the profanity of his friends and the denunciative pretext which their mad revelry would afford to the preachers of the League, threw aside the kneeling jester, and rushed into the hall. The agitated mien of the prince ; his features pale and bloodless, the effect of the monk’s attempt on his life, threw the revellers into dismay : they flew from their seats—and crowding around the monarch, hurriedly inquired what danger encompassed their liege.

Valois could not speak, but burst into tears.

CHAPTER XI.

Love asks no dull probation, but like light,
Conveys his nimble influence at first sight.

On the day subsequent to that morn which had proved so fatal to the peace of Valois, the King of Navarre was seated reading in his saloon, when, of a sudden, he beheld a stranger before him. It was the same youthful cavalier, as Henry soon recognised, who had assisted De Biron in searching for the intrusive Dominicans, and who had accompanied the King of France into the hall of the Augustine brotherhood.

Navarre was exceedingly surprised when the stranger, shedding tears, knelt to him in act of homage. It brought back old times to the memory of the prince, who had not received such a token of fealty since the massacre of St. Bartholomew; for his own servants had been removed, and replaced by others of the queen's household.

"Rise, monsieur! I am not . . . it is dangerous to kneel to me," exclaimed Navarre.

"Does not my liege remember the orphan Baron de Nevailles, left by his dying father to the care of the Queen of Navarre, and whom your royal parent—"

"De Nevailles!" exclaimed the king, the tears starting to his eyes while he embraced his friend. "You say true; I have indeed forgotten my best subject! But what danger have you risked for me to enjoy this pleasure?"

"Our valleys are without a king," said Villa Franca.

"Alas! De Nevailles," said the prince; "and how many noble spirits have I lost by my fatal journey to this accursed city! Thank God, you are safe! Do you not remember how angry you were with my venerated parent for refusing you permission to accompany me hither, on account of your childish age? The hand of God was in that. I owe him a subject for my mother's refusal. It was for the best: may all things prove so, even this imprisonment!"

"Yet must we look to ourselves for energy in lofty purpose," replied Villa Franca.

"I feel your reproof, De Nevailles," cried Navarre; "you

come to upbraid me, in the name of your countrymen, for my supineness ! Nay, speak the truth."

"In your place, sire, I would have escaped long ago," replied the Navarrese, who had indeed come to rouse his prince, and not to flatter him.

"My seeming liberty is but visionary," rejoined Navarre ; "I must use magic to escape from my imperial jailer.

"Then let me utter the charmed words," said Villa Franca. "Now listen ! Rochelle is your own when it receives your command to declare itself. De Rosny, De Grammont, and De La Tremouille, with our friends, have reckoned on fifteen thousand men, which, at your bidding, will start from their homes, equipped for the field. The Navarrese and the Huguenots of France are panting to rally round your standard, and bid defiance to the intolerant Church which oppresses them. With a brave army in Gascony, Rochelle a tower of strength, and the mountains of Navarre in our rear, what have we to dread ?"

The heart of the prince beat with delight when he heard these words. To tell him of armies at his disposal ; of cities in his keeping ; of battles to be fought, of victories to be won ; was drawing aside the curtain which concealed a new world. The years which had passed seemed like a dream ; his youth reappeared, and he was a hero once more.

"What have I done," exclaimed he, with a sigh of regret, "to deserve this fidelity ? My name has become a by-word of pleasure in this gay prison ! I have sunk my soul in sloth and luxury, while my subjects were toiling for my release. My subtle jailer has rivetted my fetters with links of gold, and concealed the iron with rose-leaves !"

"Truly," said Villa Franca, "this is a pleasant abode to live in."

"A prison with an invisible but deadly barrier," rejoined the prince ; "but was the accidental rencounter with the Marshal De Biron in the church the cause of your success in gaining admittance to my prison-home ? I can scarcely believe it !"

Villa Franca had pledged himself not to reveal the attempt of the Dominican ; and he kept his word. He revealed to Navarre the history of his arrival at Paris—his endeavour to gain a secret interview with his liege—his failure, and consequent immurement in the Bastille—the freedom allowed him on parole, his fortunate meeting with the marshal, who recognised him as the Marseillois traveller, and obtained his pardon from Catherine, who was so struck with the pliant

humour and adroit demeanour of the young man, which a long interview enabled him to display, that she took him at once into favour, and he was now domiciled in the palace in a capacity which might be styled diplomatic.

"In what department of the state?" asked Navarre, smiling.

"One of my duties is to assist the Marshal De Biron in watching your majesty and the Duke D'Alençon, whom I had the pleasure of talking to in my former visit to the Louvre," replied Villa Franca. "I find that his highness makes use of the grand hall as a closet of conference, and I am determined to fathom the mystery."

"I will save you the trouble, baron," said Henry, who thereupon related his adventure with D'Alençon, and the intention of monsieur to start very shortly for Germany.

"The mystery is now solved, I hope, to your satisfaction, De Nevailles," continued the Bourbon prince; "but I am lost in amazement at your success with her majesty. I could not have conceived it possible for any one so easily to gain her confidence."

The baron smiled. Such would have been the idea, thought he, of any man unacquainted with the secret service rendered to the house of Valois.

"Be not too vain," said Navarre, who observed the smile; "beware of her favours, monseigneur; you are but the instrument of purposes which you cannot see."

"In that respect," replied the other, "we are about equal. I shall stay here till I have your majesty out of bondage; and then, Catherine and I must settle accounts. I put entire faith in her—she has so much sincerity herself."

"Yes," said the king, thoughtfully, "our religious persecutors are doubly armed. They have both temporal and spiritual weapons; they kill us with the sword, and believe they are doing a service to Heaven. If the faith of my good mother-in-law were once touched—if the suspicion once crossed her mind that her cruelties were crimes—then conscience, which has slept, would spring up from her side, a demon twenty times her stature, and cower over her till she died. But let us talk on more interesting matters. Images of our own, Navarre, are crowding on my mind. I see the palace and the gardens at Pau—your own château, De Nevailles, in that beautiful valley, whither we oft retired from the palace with our young friends,—victims, alas! to the power which still denies me freedom. Yes! the château, with its winding road from the valley, and

the steep sides of the mountain behind ! these I long to revisit —though I should not see the little Seigneur —.”

“ Whom you and your tall friends,” cried the baron, interrupting him, “ despised, although enjoying his hospitality.”

“ Enjoy your revenge, De Nevailles,” answered the king, with a melancholy smile ; “ you are now my guest, and I feel myself before a Navarrese despicable.”

The grateful and delighted monarch, and his youthful counsellor and friend, spent many hours on subjects most interesting to their welfare—the project of D’Alençon, to whom De Nevailles became a confidant and adviser—the probability of, and the means to be employed in, the escape of Navarre—and the junction of the Huguenots and their German allies. The future presented a bright prospect, and they gave themselves up to hope.

The royal suite of rooms inhabited by her majesty, the queen-mother of France, were one unbroken line ; and the rank or office of the courtier was recognised by the extent of his right of *entrée*. The remotest was the bed-chamber, into which only certain ladies had the right of penetrating, and these only *ex-officio* ; the approximate chambers were an ante-room, with dressing-closet adjoining,—here one or more of the queen’s ladies staid day and night to prevent intrusion, wait on her majesty, or give alarm in case of danger—the private picture-gallery, in which Catherine gave audience to her favourite servants, a privilege which Villa Franca had already obtained ; beyond, the ordinary cabinet, into which were admitted ministers, ambassadors, and spies ; from this to the grand room of audience, or state apartment, where ambassadors were received at the foot of the throne.

The room known as the queen’s picture-gallery had been appropriately so called ; for the walls were hung with portraits and sketches of the ladies of the court, chiefly the performance of Catherine herself, and the Queen of Navarre. Into this chamber, where were seated the queen-mother and her new favourite, already an object of envy and malicious gossip in the palace, must we conduct our readers.

Looking at the portraits, Villa Franca beheld many of his new acquaintances ;—the brilliant, dark-eyed D’Usez, between whom and the baron there occurred a constant rivalry of wit, like the flashing of rapiers—the light airy Candaules—the intellectual Condé, with somewhat of the expression of a Bacchante in her more staid moments, telling of more than meets

the eye. Marie Stuart, the daughter-in-law of the queen, and in weeds for her husband;—this lady, however, was only known to monseigneur by report, having returned to Scotland—Catherine herself, with a face noble and majestic, and as fair as a queen who had passed her youth could desire; and to crown the wreath, Margaret, radiant in the beauty of expression, without care, with a complexion like fruit of early autumn, untouched by the sun's deepening power.

"I must cease speaking of these affairs," said Catherine, seeing the baron looking attentively at the pictorial decorations; "indeed, Villeroi tells me this is an unfit place to receive my advisers in, for how, says the secretary, can they think on Guise, when they must be so irresistibly attracted to the walls!"

"I cannot fear for myself, when your majesty is present," said Villa Franca.

And yet there was much for him to fear—one portrait, which he could not refrain from glancing at, despite his prudential tact, gallantry, and expressed avowal.

"That face!" thought he, when the conversation of the queen allowed him a moment's interval, "how beautiful! Yet how strange that it strikes me as an old acquaintance on the first meeting! Margaret is more beautiful—D'Usez even surpasses it—yet I prefer those features, and for no other reason, that I can see, than its familiarity with my imagination."

"Yes," continued the Marseillois, aloud, in answer to a remark of the queen, "it was a happy stroke of policy! How galling to those who had plotted his majesty's death, to see him depart in good health and security to Vincennes! What despair to Montpensier to find the city put in a state of siege—her brother absent at St. Denis—and the ordinance issued commanding him to retire to his estates! It must have fallen on the leaguers like a thunderbolt, making them bite the dust with vexation! Our care must now centre in the duchess and her friends; and as my face is not known, I may serve your majesty on this point. She may, and is, no doubt, plotting to effect the return of the duke."

"Look to D'Alençon and Navarre," replied the queen; "Montpensier is in safe hands. Nicholas Poulain, whose visits here are known only to one or two save yourself, will take care of madame. But you surmise rightly of her temper. She commissioned Nicholas, as he had the power of passing the barriers *ex-officio*, and without suspicion, to go to St. Denis with a letter to the duke, entreating him to come hither this

very night, and that the leaguers shall be prepared to place the barricades. I wish the lieutenant were returned."

"And I wish," thought Villa Franca, with another glance at the portrait, "that my venerable preceptor and disputant, Beza, were here. I am just in the humour to contend that there are certain impressions on the senses, accompanied essentially in the mind of the subject, with a belief of its previous consciousness of them."

"Then Nicholas," added the young man aloud, breaking from his momentary reverie, "has communicated with your majesty since his commission from Madame Montpensier. Guise may, perhaps, find his way through the barriers, or arrive by the market-boats from St. Denis!"

"That cannot happen!" exclaimed the queen. "When Poulain came to me to-day, and asked, to my astonishment, if I had any commands for the Duke of Guise, I said, none from ourself. But I requested Nicholas to inform the poor protector that two thousand Swiss were marching on St. Denis to force him to evacuate; and this is not wholly a fiction, as Grillon is on the road with a battalion. Cavalry would have marched too quickly; and it would have been an awkward affair to have taken him prisoner. If I had him in the Louvre, the Louvre would be stormed: if I sent him to the Bastille, the Bastille would be surrounded. Let him go to Picardy or to the devil."

"Your majesty," said Villa Franca, smiling, "wants only instruments and not advisers!"

"Not so," replied Catherine; "Poulain himself often counsels well. Poor fellow! what tribulation he was in, after escaping from the duke at St. Denis on the day of the installation. He believed my son was dead, and called himself the murderer. I sent to De Biron in alarm, but the marshal wrote back that you had fortunately anticipated the part of the lieutenant. Yet Nicholas, despite his devotion to us, has a strong love of life, or he would have risked it, at such a crisis, by escaping sooner from the cowardly assassins. A loyal gentleman would have ventured soul and body to save his sovereign—yet Heaven, which has granted us the services of our spy, saw the danger and averted it."

The conversation then turned on the behaviour of Navarre and the Duke D'Alençon, in the midst of which Davila announced the return of a messenger.

"It is Nicholas," said the queen, rising. As the spy was not permitted to enter the picture-gallery, her majesty with-

drew to receive him in the cabinet, where he was awaiting her presence.

Poulain related, that he found Guise and his friends awaiting an express from Montpensier, undecided on what course to pursue, when he delivered the letter, and spoke of the rapid march of the Swiss.

This changed the face of affairs entirely. The duke wrote an answer to his sister's exhortations, and bidding his good ally, the lieutenant, to look upon her as the head of the League during his absence, turned to his friends, and bade them mount and be gone.

"I have lost this day," cried he; "but to-morrow will be mine."

"Ah!" muttered Nicholas, as he rode back, "it has been summer with you long enough, while my lieges have shivered in their palace."

Catherine smiled at this narration: his conference with her was short. He was leaving the palace when the queen-mother sent for him again.

"Poulain!" cried she, with a satirical smile, "my cousin Montpensier expected by this time to have been mistress here. Lose not a moment in telling her all the news, and paint every thing to vex her;—the hand of the artist will not be visible."

To say the truth, there was little need of excitation to the lieutenant's ability in this respect: he knew enough of the human heart, without being either a learned man or a philosopher, to know when and where to strike; and his hazardous profession required amusement.

On entering the withdrawing room of the duchess, he found her pacing it, dictating the while to Father Lincestre and the Chevalier D'Aumale. She was a tall masculine woman, too young for the beholder to attribute the lines which had made inroads upon the beauty of her fine features to any other effect than violent passions: but her eye, which was large and brilliant, grew the brighter with her years. Had Poulain been a man of any fancy, he might have been struck with her resemblance to an Amazonian queen rating her captive slaves; their sitting position adding apparently to her height.

As much as lay in his intractable features, he assumed a pleasant look.

"Ah!" cried the duchess upon seeing him, "here comes our long-expected Mercury; may Mars be near!"

Then walking to the lieutenant, she asked, in a loud whisper, "Is he within the walls?"

The lieutenant shook his head, but still smiled.

"What!" exclaimed the impatient duchess, "has your sorry brute outpaced the war-steed of Henry of Lorraine? Shame! that in this noble race for a crown, a stulted citizen should outstrip the Guise! Where is he? Before the day appears, every street of this city must be barricadoed. We are only waiting for the duke's signal."

"I know not by this time where the duke is, most noble lady!" replied the lieutenant; "but he disapproved of your highness's advice."

"Disapproved!" shouted Montpensier, in her rage seizing Nicholas by the collar. "Disapproved is not the word for me! Where is my brother?"

Feeling her hand tremble in its grasp, he began to be alarmed, and saw that it was time to cease, lest pleasure should end in pain: he said, therefore, with an air of humility, while feeling for the letter—

"Monseigneur escaped as the Swiss were approaching."

"Escaped!—Wretch!" screamed the lady, letting go her hold with such a convulsive effort that the lieutenant fell at her feet.

D'Aumale and the father rushed forward with an instinctive feeling, lest the worthy confidant should suffer more violence. While Lincestre assisted him to rise, the chevalier picked up the letter from Guise, which had dropped from the hand of Poulain in his fall.

When the duchess had read the contents, her wrath turned upon the absent protector: she scrupled not to brand him with the epithets of coward, poltroon, and deserter.

"Am I," cried she, addressing her two friends, "to proclaim to our good citizens that the protector dare not face his enemies? Shall I tell them that the beards of the Swiss have frightened his princely blood—that he has turned his rein and fled away?"

"When Guise turns his rein," said D'Aumale, who saw that it was necessary to restrain her violence, "it is not for a woman to demand that swords be drawn. He knows the stake he's playing for; and will not spoil his fortune by intemperance. Hear what Poulain says."

"It is the will of Heaven that we wait in patience," said Lincestre.

"Holy father!" responded the duchess, casting upon the preacher a withering look.

It was with great difficulty that her relative and the monk

could induce the virago to restrain her mood, and discuss the difficulties of their position. The duchess not expecting otherwise than that Guise would return with her messenger, and as it was easy in such company to pass the barriers, had given orders to the council of Sixteen, each to hold himself in his ward ready, at a moment's notice, to take possession of the streets, and to fortify them with chains drawn across from the opposite houses, after the old Parisian fashion. This would at once have circumscribed the agents and military power of the court within a narrow space; Guise would, in fact, have been lord of the city.

Hence the excessive rage in being baffled, by what appeared to her courageous spirit, mere cowardice;—cowardice where ought to have shone the most daring chivalry. But the protector, though possessing as much valour and skill as any captain of the age, was of cool temperament, and looked to every course of action before he ventured on a dangerous enterprise. He perceived clearly that the day was against him—that the city was in the hands of his enemy; and it would have been rashness in adding to the disaster by voluntarily encountering a body of troops sent to intercept his approach. He knew his power with the majority of the nation; that the fight might be won in other cities besides Paris;—so he fled from the seat of empire, like Satan driven from the field of contest, and a long train of chivalry followed him.

By his post of lieutenant-general of the forces of the kingdom, he was commander-in-chief, and a mooted cause of quarrel with the court was Catherine's refusal to allow him to commence a crusade against the Huguenots. Yet neither his desire, nor the queen's aversion, sprung from pure and sincere motives. Though Catherine hated the Huguenots, she would not allow them to be crushed, lest the ultra-Catholics should become too powerful; and though Guise pretended religious zeal in demanding the employ, it was in truth only a desire of pleasing his ally the Church. Upon his retreat or banishment, which ever name it deserved, he was cut from his influence with the army; but there were several regiments composing his own division, of whose fidelity he felt assured; there were also the forces of the Duke of Lorraine, and the retainers of the ultra-Catholic gentry throughout the kingdom to support him. Thus he retired with the assurance of raising a formidable, if not irresistible, opposition to his enemies.

But Montpensier took no heed of these calculations; her mind was bent upon seeing her relative on the throne, and with

the imperious volition of a woman, she had resolved that the attempt should be made in a day or two at most; as there was a sufficient number of gentlemen of her party in Paris to lead on the citizens in their peculiar warfare, to the ejection of the tenants of the Louvre.

Poulain seated himself doggedly in the duchess's chair, eying with secret satisfaction the unbridled violence of her rage, and the ineffectual attempt of her two advisers to restrain it. Lincestre, who was an imbodiment of the haughtiness of the priesthood, fancying himself superior in functions and character to the noblest temporal princes, could ill brook the sarcasms which she poured out upon him.

"Daughter!" exclaimed the monk, in a stern voice, "if you continue in this excited state, it will overpower you, and some fatal word may destroy our hopes. You do but ill repay the care which the Church has taken of your family. Wait till the proper season, till the harvest is ripe—and depend upon us that the reapers shall be ready."

"Wait," cried the duchess, "what a horrid word is that! the citizens respect me—adore my brother and myself, they crowd round my chair as I pass through the streets. Would they not rally round me now—this very night!" continued she, her enthusiasm imparting to her tall figure an air of heroism, which made D'Aumale breathe quicker, and almost inclined him to give the signal alarm to the citizens. "Yes! let tomorrow's sun, by the blessing of God, shine upon a city wholly, truly, and sincerely Catholic! let the prostration of our enemies call forth my brother from his coward retreat."

"It must not be! it must not be!" repeated D'Aumale, endeavouring to repress her enthusiasm; "hear what Poulain says, who knows the state of both friends and foes more exactly than we do."

Nicholas, who during the scene had gradually stretched out his legs, rested his elbows on the velvet covered arms of the chair, and sat with his head pushed forward to catch every look and tone of the speakers, now hastily drew himself into a position more befitting the noble presence of the company.

"Well, lieutenant, you must forgive the excitement of her highness in consideration of the cause," said D'Aumale, addressing him:—"What is your opinion of beginning our labours in the absence of the protector?"

Poulain rose from his seat—hemmed and paused several times, as though he were afraid that his opinion would not be relished—at length ventured to say, that his earnestness for the holy

cause made him sometimes venture within the precincts of the palace, to catch any stray news which might be floating among the domestics, with several of whom he was familiar. That previous to coming to her highness's hotel, he had ventured into the Louvre to hear what was said about the Duke of Guise; but his chatting friends were so busy in preparing a fête in the hall of the hundred Swiss, that he could not get to speak to them. A lackey of the Duke D'Alençon, however, who had been once in the municipal force, told him as a secret, that he had heard monsieur his master say that the queen was about to divert herself with a private ballet, which the Princess De Condé called *Montpensier at the Louvre*, and that the princess would show how her highness—here Nicholas stammered with affected or real fear—would have deported herself had she gained possession of the palace. Nicholas concluded by saying, that while they were amusing themselves, an attack might, he thought, be made with success.

Montpensier heard the narration in silence; but her teeth were clenched convulsively, and she breathed audibly. Poulain had fulfilled his mistress's instructions to the very letter:—the duchess laughed like a mad woman.

She sat herself in the chair from which her tormentor had arisen. Lincestre seized this opportunity of renewing his desire that her party should be quiet a season; but before he alluded to this topic, he dexterously availed himself of her present temper, and fell into its mood entirely, that in seeming company he might afterward draw her into his own views. He inveighed bitterly—a theme grateful as the incense shed about the altar—against the licentiousness, hypocrisy, and cruelty of the court, the diabolic character of Catherine, and the inane delusion of Valois. To remove this hated family from the throne was, he said, the daily object of his life, the nightly purport of his prayers. The eyes of the duchess sparkled with joy and rage.

Valois, he told her, in a soothing strain, was only fit for the cloister, and that it was the intention of the Church to have him confined in a convent for life, when the protector had assumed the reins of government.

"May heaven make few days and nights between us and that happy event!" cried Montpensier.—"Yes! Father—and I swear that these scissors," and she snatched up from her table the golden instruments, "shall be kept sacred to shape his head for the tonsure!"

"Umph!" said Poulain to himself,— "I wish her majesty

had seen you under the infliction of my lash—another trial anon.”

Lincestre then gradually developed the views of the League, and showed the rashness of an attack without the presence of the protector. Catherine might be at that moment off her guard, but De Biron was too watchful to be caught asleep. The cannon of the arsenal were pointed on the city—the garrison trebled—and Vincennes crowded with troops ready to pour into Paris in case of necessity.

The preacher now reaped the fruits of his skill. He had, by sympathizing with her passion, broken its fierceness ; she listened with calmness to his reasons for delay, and her better judgment confessed their truth.

Poulain was dismissed after receiving madame’s thanks for the patience with which he had borne her temper. He repaired successively to all the wards of the city, and relieved the Sixteen from their post, where each sat waiting the signal for civic commotion.

Villa Franca, whom we left in the picture-gallery while Catherine was engaged in listening to the report of the spy, was well content to remain where he was, gazing on the portrait which had taken such deep hold of his fancy. But the re-appearance of the queen dispelled his musing, and he retired, after hearing the nature of Poulain’s communication, with a determination to discover the fair original. But in vain did he look for her among the ladies resident in the palace ; he could discover no trace of her ; and to make inquiry respecting what he had seen in the private audience-room of his royal mistress was a folly from which he refrained, alike deterred by prudence and a sense of ridicule.

One morning, however, found him in the picture-gallery awaiting the appearance of the queen. As he could not discover the lady herself, a fancy seized him of making a sketch of his mysterious favourite ; but before the drawing was finished, some one touched the handle of the door opening from the public suite. Afraid that her majesty would surprise him using her materials, he hastily arose, and throwing down the pencil, retreated with the sketch behind a screen ornamented with designs, which he pretended to be admiring.

The door opened and shut again ; and he heard footsteps unlike those of her majesty. Venturing to peep over the edge of the screen, he beheld, to his utter amazement, one whom his heart pronounced the original of the portrait ! The figure walked across the room with a pensive air like one in grief,

and without looking on either side, went out by the opposite door in the direction of her majesty's dormitory.

"*Mon Dieu !*" exclaimed Villa Franca, "was it a ghost? Yet how gracefully it walked! It seemed troubled in mind! so much the better—there was no affectation in the step, which was a true Pavanne! Stay! I'll finish my sketch—and if she come back—and come back she must—as they say the communication from the interior except by this road is always trebly fastened—she shall herself sit for the last touches—the heaving of the bosom—the trembling of the eyelid—the motion of the blue rivulets beneath the snow; Beza calls them carnal streams—the—what is the last touch? The bloom on the lips."

He sat down to his work in good earnest, and actuated by the energy and feeling of a painter in love with his subject, he produced a sketch which might be fairly said to portray the expression of the original.

"And who may the fair original be?" exclaimed the artist, while comparing his sketch with that on the wall,—“one of the countless throng who glide about the palace, and then disappear awhile, to seek a change in their quiet homes? By her sad face, I suppose she is about to lay some complaint before the queen—it is time she returned, as her majesty is not there—I would be sworn, if I were to penetrate beyond the bounds of either secretary or favourite, I should find my unknown trying on the queen's jewels! Ah! here comes the pensive shade."

When the lady re-appeared, she started on seeing the chair occupied by a stranger, who pretended equal surprise on his part. She was about to leave the room, when Villa Franca in alarm at the prospect of losing the opportunity, said—

"If mademoiselle be in search of her majesty, she had better stay—madame will return immediately."

The lady made her obeisance haughtily, and persevered in her intention of leaving our young friend to himself; but he was determined not to be repulsed.

"May I ask," said he, "the name of one of those ladies who look down upon us with their smiles?"

"I know but very few," replied the lady;—"I have not been here many days."

"Just my case, mademoiselle," rejoined Villa Franca; "and Madame D'Usez tells me that I must stay here twelve months to meet all the ladies of the court. You know the duchess, I am sure—that lady with the dark eyes."

"I have seen her many times," replied the lady, looking at the portrait with a smile which enchanted the artist; and she made another movement towards the door.

"One stranger should assist another, mademoiselle, in this wilderness of a palace," exclaimed Villa Franca; "I have been sketching the portrait of a lady, and I would give more than I am worth to know her name. She is among that galaxy, but not one of them. They look friendly, and smile upon the beholder, as pictures ought to do which meet the constant gaze of a sovereign; but there is one who looks too proud to smile,—or may be, grief has touched her cheek. I am sure she can be no favourite with our Lady of the Louvre, who has enough care of her own, without being perpetually reminded of the sorrows of others. I will tell her majesty so, when she comes, and ask leave to remove it. But if you know her name, pray, in charity, tell me?"

The lady changed colour more than once while he spoke—she wished to go away, but could not—there was a spell in his words, if not in his gaze.

"Your description, monseigneur," said she, less haughtily than before, "is too vague for me to recognise whom you mean."

He had purposely refrained from glancing at the wall, that his eyes might not indicate the beauty alluded to.

"Well, I will be more concise," said the artist, looking upon his own sketch. "An eyebrow like the bow of heaven, and beneath, an eyelid still more beautifully arched, a rare beauty, and reminding me of the inner arch of the rainbow. An eye as unfathomable as the deepest well, with the sunlight playing on its surface. A mouth more pouting and rich than even Queen Margaret's. A brow like a wall of ivory, curving beneath a mass of tendrils and foliage, with gems instead of blossom. A haughty troubled expression between pride and grief. Say, am I plain enough?"

Whether through fear, anger, or surprise, the lady did not immediately reply.

"Nay, then, if mademoiselle be still in doubt," continued he, "I must show her my sketch;" and so saying, he approached her—she seemed much inclined to withdraw—but curiosity, or some other feeling, withheld her.

"Can you at all guess," said Villa Franca.

Whether she had previously resolved the question or not, we cannot say; a glance at the drawing sent the colour to her

cheeks ; but there was an alarm in her countenance which our young friend could not understand.

"You may have seen the lady without knowing her name!" said Villa Franca, who wished to relieve her confusion.

She attempted to speak, but the words failed her. At length her courage returned ; she took the portrait in her hand—looked at it, and said—

"I know not her name—you should not—there is danger—excuse me, monseigneur, you are safer without this drawing—and, if wise, will not speak of it." And so, making her obeisance, she quickly darted out of the room.

"If wise—will not speak of it!" exclaimed Villa Franca, looking at the door which closed behind her. "Why, no! a week's ridicule would follow my steps if I did. Her behaviour is very strange—I have no reminiscence for that. I dare not follow her, lest the queen should appear at a wrong time. Well! this is a coranto without music."

He returned to the portrait, and stood gazing at it some minutes in silence.

"There is no trace of levity," said he at length, "and she said there was danger in my keeping the sketch ; it may be so—and she almost trembled. How inferior that daub to the sweet original—may she not be a victim—the heiress of a Huguenot, whose parents were slain in the massacre?—yet she said she had not lived at the palace long—a stranger—yes! or Ronsard would have sung the praises of those soul-lit eyes long since. Grief and pride! may not grief have been the cause of her pride—and oppression the cause of her grief? How cruel to have carried away my sketch—and yet I would rather she had it than any one, save myself. There is consolation in that ;—if she be an oppressed orphan—without friends—and under the control of my royal mistress—she will treasure the drawing, as a token that a stranger felt interest in her—Ay! smile on D'Usez! with those beams of splendour! Your tones of triumph, too, are exhilarating—but I would rather hear the warbling of the forlorn lute, which speaks the grief of you unknown!"

These reflections were put an end to by the entrance of the queen ; and Villa Franca and her majesty were soon discussing the policy of Guise.

With the changing aspects of dynasties and parties, the fortunes of private individuals were not more tranquil. Even the eccentric, but smooth-tempered Villa Franca, found his lustre diminished by increasing cares. He had, since the interview

just narrated, assisted secretly in starting D'Alençon for his German mission ; and he was now engaged in the still more difficult business of Navarre's escape. His employment with Catherine—giving advice, and sometimes consolation, in her political cares—bringing ambassadors to be more friendly with each other, and setting others by the ears—collecting every anecdote and *historiette* for the evening banquet of mirth and malice—câjoling Villeroi, piquing D'Usez—planning ballets with Condé, and similar amusements ;—all these, and other pastimes, contributed to deprive him of sleep, rest, and quietness.

But these appeared trifles after his adventure in the queen's boudoir. The image of the lady who had stolen his drawing was constantly present to his imagination ; but far otherwise the fair reality. She was nowhere to be seen. In vain he searched the gardens, the saloons, and the long corridors of the palace ; she had fled away from the Louvre, or hidden herself where he durst not continue his search. To have made inquiries of his fair friends would have been committing suicide—

"No !" exclaimed he, despondingly ; "my reputation, my power would be gone. I should remain a monument of ridicule if I were seen walking about the palace, inquiring of every one if they had seen a stray damsel with arched eyebrows and Elysian mouth."

It was now that he regretted the absence of his servant Antoine, one of the cleverest of the class ; one who would have gone forth and questioned every female domestic under her majesty's roof ere he would have returned to his master with a hopeless tale. Villa Franca—or the Baron De Nevaillies, as he was called in his native province, Bearn—had left all his suite at the Château De Nevaillies, save Antoine, who had journeyed with his master as far north as Orleans, when he embarked on his hazardous travels. He now regretted their absence, as he was forced to depend on creatures whom he could not trust. In this affair, so called, of the heart, he was alone in the world.

But there are some men who thrive best when the resources for every emergency proceed from themselves. In the absence of Antoine, Villa Franca saw that he must be his own eaves-dropper.

Labour may—but perseverance never goes unrewarded. He was one morning closeted with Catherine, listening to her complaints of Villeroi's affection for the League—which, as he had some knowledge of, through his unintentional concealment

during her interview with the secretary in the garden, she made no secret, though her usual policy was never to expose, unless necessary, the real or supposed delinquencies of one servant to another—the outer door opened, and there appeared a vision which so dazzled him, that his sight for several moments was indistinct.

The queen turned in displeasure towards the intruder, who approached her majesty with an air of timidity, as much to deprecate her anger as in fear of its effect—at least so thought Villa Franca. He was not so good a physiognomist as the histrionic Chicot, yet he could not help believing that there was as much pride as gentleness expressed in the lips of the fair unknown. Her humility he deemed policy; and he sympathized with it, as one naturally delighting in the intricacies of court intrigues.

She informed Catherine that the Queen of Navarre was anxious to see her majesty, and had desired mademoiselle, with the queen's permission, to wait her coming.

"The Queen of Navarre is as imperious as ourself in her commands," said Catherine. "Mademoiselle must amuse herself with our paintings. Try, monseigneur," added she, addressing Villa Franca, "to forget her presence!"

The favourite was surprised to find that the lady caused no restraint on the freedom of their colloquy. While her majesty was busied looking for some papers, the Marseillois, looking at mademoiselle, who had seated herself at a distance, pointed to her portrait, and then held out his hand, intimating that he wished the sketch restored to him. She coloured slightly, and turned away her head, but only for a few seconds. He pretended to be angry, and to threaten appealing to the queen. The lady smiled. He made a gesture, as though he were about to disturb her majesty: the features of his new friend underwent an expression of anxiety, lest he should do that in earnest of which he only made pretence.

"Have you seen any change in the King of Navarre since the departure of my son?" exclaimed the queen-mother.

"Since monsieur has gone to Tours," replied Villa Franca, "I think his majesty has looked sadder—certainly, as if he had missed a companion."

"One evil corrects another," continued Catherine. "François has found himself poor, and been obliged to visit the seat of his government and exchequer. I hope he will remain there."

The Marseillois could scarcely repress a smile.

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The entry of the Queen of Hearts put an end to the interview. Mademoiselle arose to meet her. Whether she had found a protectress in the Queen of Navarre against Catherine's harshness, Villa Franca could not determine; but she appeared to feel a natural delight in the presence of the former, quite at variance with the chilling influence of the Queen of France. He bowed lowly to the consort of his liege, whom he seldom saw or spoke to but in the company of Madame D'Usez, and snatching a hasty glance at the unknown's portrait—for, from the position of the parties, he durst not venture to look at the original, but trusted that his ideal leave-taking would be seen and appreciated—he left the trio to themselves.

After that interview, he often met Mademoiselle Emilie in the queen's picture-gallery. She had the right of *entrée* to the queen's bedchamber, between which and the private audience-room, or queen's picture-gallery, as it was called, there intervened only one room. But instead of passing through directly, she staid to hear the entreaties of our young friend for the restoration of his picture. Gradually these visits were lengthened, other matters were talked of, and a seeming confidence resulted from their frequent interviews. Yet but little of her history did Villa Franca acquire beyond her name of Emilie, in itself a treasure. He perceived that she was oppressed by sorrow or misfortune; and it required no great sagacity to discover that it did not spring from her own demerit, but from the conduct of her friends, real or assumed.

Her ostensible rank as one of the ladies of the Queen of Navarre, was a proof of good lineage; and her privilege with Catherine would have convinced him of her high favour with this queen, had not an apparent dread on one part, and suspicion on the other, relatively existed between them. That there was some cause for this feeling was beyond a doubt; but that it originated in the destiny, and not in the conduct of Emilie, Villa Franca firmly believed. Its influence, however, was pernicious to her happiness; she was restrained from joining in the society of the ladies of the court, and confined to the narrow circle of the rooms of their majesties. She was but a new inhabitant of the palace; and was believed by the ladies to be an orphan, whom Margaret had taken under her protection; and her frequent visits to the queen-mother were attributed to her skill in drawing, in which the queen delighted. It was whispered maliciously, that many of the portraits which adorned the walls of the queen's picture-gallery, and of which Margaret and the queen-mother claimed the performance, were

retouched by Mademoiselle Emilie. This, however, was only rumour; courtiers are excellent logicians, they know that nothing is, or becomes what it is, without a cause; and they could not in any other mode account for the close intimacy of Emilie with their majesties. But though she was envied for this seeming favour, could they have beheld the distrust and fear with which she approached the haughty-Catherine; had they known that her seclusion from the gayeties of the palace was not voluntary, they would have preferred their own liberty without the dangerous privilege now coveted.

To one living in such constraint, the continued sympathy of a stranger could not fail of being interesting. Margaret was a friend—a kind friend—but she was as capricious as Catherine was haughty, and though a mutual confidence existed which made hours passed in each other's society delightful, yet these hours were but few, as the Queen of Navarre was surrounded by a circle who allowed her but little time for retirement, Emilie was left to herself—and in this state the proffered sympathy of a man like Villa Franca could not, in any likelihood, be rejected. But the growth of this feeling was gradual. Our diplomatist thought and spoke in such a glittering atmosphere of fancy, that it were impossible to say what he meant; if his design were to move her heart, he certainly never appealed to it direct. His eccentric remarks, often burlesque, and as often poetical; his constant endeavour to excite her laughter, as if his whole vocation were the creation of smiles; his playful threats of calling in the queen to discover their interviews; these and similar efforts seemed to be directed only to her fancy. But beneath this glitter and show there was an under current of feeling, deep, but scarcely visible; a solicitude which seemed to follow her eye to anticipate her wishes; a sympathy which seemed to mourn over her unhappiness, and to which his gayer faculties were only obedient ministrants to divert her care: and above all—the touchstone of a noble mind—the absence of all curiosity to pry into her troubles and her history.

Had some magical queen of old, in the midst of her enchantments and her spells, become oppressed with grief, and sought to remove it by the creation of a being of air to bring her fresh dreams—build her new aerial palaces—people the space of her vision with glorious images—make a new paradise about her;—in fine, do all but interest her heart, she would have created a Villa Franca in all but flesh and blood.

But though he appealed only to the fancy of Emilie—to her

sense of mirth, and delight of wit—there were glances which could not be misconstrued, and which sank like arrows into her heart.

But even after their mutual weakness had become apparent to each other ; when it could not be disguised that both came to the picture-gallery on a false, or at least double, pretence, he still continued his playful eccentric addresses. Though it had happened one day that there was a mysterious pause in his mirth—that he looked so earnestly at her, “his wrapt soul sitting in his eyes,” that she could not support the gaze, but as it were blinded with light, looked downward, yet fascinated, raised her eyes again ; while he, though of firmer nature, was equally stricken, and had scarcely the power to meet her uplifted gaze ; so that there ensued a play of fervent, yet pure love—still the veil was not drawn aside ; they still remained a mystery to each other.

Though he never sought to learn her history and the cause of Catherine's distrust, yet he felt anxious to exert himself for the removal of her sorrow, and ventured more than once to allude to his own power with the queen, telling her that her portrait would require a companion ; it was Emilie *penserosa*, and would be an unfaithful likeness when the season of her smiles returned.

From love to policy. These interviews were succeeded by others of a sterner nature ; and Villa Franca, with a mind attuned to softer themes, encountered and grappled with the vigorous plans of Catherine, hardening his heart in the contest of argument and discussion.

CHAPTER XII.

—————Now I see

The mystery of your loneliness—————

Speak, is't so!

If it be so, you have wound a goodly clue;
If it be not, forswear't: howe'er, I charge thee,
As Heaven shall work in me for thine avail,
To tell me truly.

SHAKESPEARE.

As Villa Franca, after an interview with Emilie, was walking alone in the garden of the Tuileries,—now happily regardless of the Swiss—he was disturbed from his reverie by a loud and discordant laugh, impressing the nerves of hearing with an acute sense of pain from its abruptness and prolongation. Without looking up, his sense of ridicule told him that it was directed against himself—a blow at his philosophy. When he looked around, he saw Chicot, who had assumed the attitude of contemplation, out of which he himself had just been driven.

"You have not forgotten me in your prosperity, I hope, Monsieur Villa Franca?" said Chicot.

"No!" replied the other, "I have not forgotten that I owe my favour at court to a jester. 'Tis a glorious introduction to a glorious career."

"I do not repent my act," rejoined the jester; "you were a child of promise, and have turned out well. But I did not dream of your gentility!"

"Am I to descend into my grave," asked Villa Franca, "without knowing the signs by which you recognised my promise, and the reason why you took me by the hand?"

"Be secret as the grave, and I will tell you now—you have fulfilled my purpose!" replied Chicot.

"What you say," replied the young man, "shall be kept as sacred as an elixir of life."

"Revenge prompted me, and fear for the loss of my sway," said Chicot, assuming a grave tone:—"In walking about the saloons, you have met with a dark, snappish woman, called the Duchess D'Usez—that woman threatened to extinguish me.

Her excuse is that I nearly broke the tympanum of her ear by laughing close to it at a masquerade in the palace."

"You do make a horrid noise!" said Villa Franca.

"After that, she threatened to ruin me with his majesty," said Chicot; "but I hope that, as long as I can make him laugh, it will be beyond her power. She has, to my sorrow and discomfort, thrown me quite out of favour with the queen."

"How did she attempt to succeed with his majesty," asked Villa Franca.

"How?" replied the jester, grinning; "by saying that I had not the soul of a jest in me! That I split people's ears, and substituted sound for wit. That I was a cracked discordant reed—and no fool."

"And what did Valois say?" inquired the friend of the jester.

"He told her," replied Chicot, with a revengeful grin, "that when the sky fell she would catch larks. And that when there were no provinces to be rescued from the Huguenots, or treaties to be broken with England, she fell to picking holes in my coat. But he gave her his royal promise that I should never laugh again in her ear, and furthermore, that he would command me—in compensation of the injury—to laugh in the ear of any one with whom she was displeased—this he thought justice, and only justice."

"Well! and whom did you drive to distraction?" said Villa Franca.

"When the royal word was given," answered Chicot, "she ordered me to ring a peal in the ear of Valois himself."

"That was clever, Chicot!" remarked his diplomatic friend.

"Yes," said the jester, "and the king laughed as heartily as he does at my efforts—and said she was my equal. He gave her a ring to let him off the infliction. Besides her contempt of myself, madame assumes too much power in the palace—neither D'Espernon nor myself dare oppose her in some things—and my mind was bent on humbling her, when chance threw you in my way—and I said to myself—'There is my instrument.' She was a nightingale once, but you have dwarfed her into a canary."

"I owe you much," said Villa Franca; "in time, I doubt not, I shall be as powerful as yourself."

"Take my advice," exclaimed the jester, pleased with the compliment; "and beware of a fall. You have reached a giddy height in a short time, and may tumble either through giddiness or enemies. You despise these legs of green and red, but by our lady! they would protect me when a gallant

like yourself might be rolling from one disgrace to another, till his legs, or any part of him, were not visible. I knew not you were a gentleman, and am sorry for your condition. I had planned a humbler, a safer, but not less powerful course for you. I can see very well, as plainly as I saw your talents, that you are even now in a dilemma."

Villa Franca laughed incredulously; though he was forced inwardly to admit the truth of the remark.

"A change has come over you—even your features are altered," continued Chicot;—"care, anxiety, and even suspicion has been added to simple earnestness of purpose, your primary characteristic."

"Away with these fancies," cried the young man, laughing outright; "your zeal for my welfare sees only the phantasms of your fear."

"Well, I have done," replied the jester;—"only remember that if you need my assistance, and the service be not contrary to my fealty, you shall have it."

After thanking him for his proffered aid, Villa Franca inquired concerning Valois.

"Neither I nor yourself need envy him," answered Chicot; "he cuts open a pie as if he expected a man-at-arms to jump out of it."

"Cuts open a pie!" exclaimed the other; "then I am an aggrieved man. He gave me only bread and honey for supper."

"He could do no more for me," rejoined Chicot, "so I supped elsewhere. I have done so much good to mankind that I may be excused submitting to their follies. I mean, that I may be excused certain extra devotional exercises, very good of themselves. But his majesty is so low in spirits, that M. de Miron, upon coming to visit him, declared that the convent fare was too poor: so affairs are altered now in his particular case. Poor Brother Bouillon has gone home by M. de Miron's advice—longer abstinence would have been fatal to his column of bone and flesh."

"Yes!" said Villa Franca, "his column is of the Composite order, and is out of place or taste with Doric simplicity."

"It is probable," said Chicot, after a pause, "that we may have to put on our helmets—you laugh, and you are right—I do not look well in an iron cap; my nose is not prominent enough—but clap an esquire's helmet on my head, vizor down, and a good sword in my hand—I should prefer the almost for-

gotten mace—I would shame the knighthood of half the chivalry of France.”

“The opportunity may certainly soon arrive,” remarked his friend;—“there is nothing I should like better than following the course of the red sea of your mace, crying the while, ‘Chicot to the rescue!’”

“That is not my cry,” replied the jester; “it is ‘fool or no fool;’ and I never shout till my weapon is rushing downward, so that the echo to my war-cry comes from beneath the helmet of my antagonist!”

“Like the inspired Hebrew,” remarked Villa Franca, “upon your striking the iron rock a stream follows.”

“Yes,” replied Chicot, looking at his friend with a peculiar indentation of his remarkable facial muscle, “and the chalybeate blushes red for opening the door to a fool’s knock.”

“Never fear D’Usez,” said Villa Franca, with a quiet look, which the other properly appreciated.

After some speculation on the probable result of the Duke of Guise’s appeal to the army, Villa Franca suddenly asked the jester what brought him to Paris.

“That which will bring many of the penitents hither,” replied Chicot,—“the queen’s masquerade and fête. I was sorry to hear that monsieur had become poor, and started for his government at Tours, for I had intended dressing myself as the Queen of England, and following him like a shadow the whole evening.”

“It would have made your peace with D’Usez,” said Villa Franca.

“It is talked of among our circle,” said Chicot, “that you are a spy upon the poor King of Navarre.”

“If I be,” replied the other, “I am only subordinate to the Marshal de Biron, the ablest general in France, and the lord of a barony as old as,”—he was about to add ‘my own;’ but correcting himself hastily, he substituted “any in the kingdom.”

“I have often felt an inclination to give the King of Navarre my friendship,” said Chicot, dropping the personality of the conversation; “but the danger is great. My enemies would not appreciate the disinterestedness of my motives—and Valois might grow jealous. He is a prisoner and no prisoner. Look at those Swiss; they form a line of circumvallation about the royal domain. No one in human shape can pass either to or from the Louvre without being seen by one or more of those longbeards. And yet look at Navarre in the palace! he

might be taken for its monarch. And he will no doubt be at the masquerade—”

But the jester found himself unattended to ; his conversation had excited a speculation in the mind of Villa Franca, whether the masquerade might not be made subservient to the king's escape. The hour of the masques' departure might prove an opportunity well worth the attempt.”

“What ! a relapse,” cried Chicot, seeing his friend so abstracted ; “do you walk about like Valois, in fear of your life—or are you studying a part for the masquerade ? If you have grown melancholy like Brother Henry, hear the prescription of De Miron ! He has commanded the superior to try the amusement of hunting, and we are to have a noble day of it at Fontainebleau.”

“When ?” cried Villa Franca, so abruptly as to startle the jester.

“When ?” shouted Chicot, imitating his friend. “Now if you had spoken so to Brother Henry, or even in his hearing, he would have fancied an assassin at his elbow !”

After uttering these words, the jester pondered a moment or two—a new thought seemed to have flashed across his mind, and he cried out—

“I now see it all ! What a fool I was to be so blind ! What a change there will be in the world !” and the jester began dancing about the alley in irregular fanciful steps, to the gaping astonishment of the sentinel, who stood guard at the end of the avenue.

“When does his majesty take his pleasure at Fontainebleau, Chicot ?” cried his impatient friend.

“I see it all !” cried Chicot : “Mars ! Venus ! Jupiter !” These words were nearly lost on the other, from the rapid rotary motion of the body of the speaker.

“Tell me the day—and you may dance to the moon if you like !”

“Tell me when you first sighed,” said Chicot, pausing in his career, “and I will tell you the result ;” and he recommenced spinning round his friend like an inebriated fish.

“You are wrong, Chicot,” said Villa Franca, inwardly annoyed.

“No ! may I shake hands with Pluto if I am,” cried the other.

“Adieu !” rejoined the vexed diplomatist, who was in no mood for mirth, and commenced walking back to the palace.

“Confirmed ! confirmed ! Nostradamus says so,” shouted Chicot ; “seeks retirement—avoids his friends—looks like a

debtor—ha ! ha !” and he flung himself into the air as Bacchus sprang from his chariot—save that, on coming to the ground, the jester twirled more like Terpsichore than the jovial god. The beard of the sentinel wagged like a willow branch shaken by the wind.

Villa Franca was vexed both with himself and the fool ; he did not like to run his friend through the lungs—so he ran off at the top of his speed, the jester after him ; while the sentinel was so convulsed with laughter that he leaned against a stone column as powerless as a child.

The younger man proved the better runner till he reached a path in the gardens, when a sentinel suddenly rushed forward, and caught the favourite of Catherine in his powerful grasp, and they both rolled over and along the ground. The Swiss would not let go his hold till he had fairly examined the face of his antagonist, when, in great alarm, he got upon his knees, and begged pardon for his blunder—

“*Mon Dieu ! Monseigneur !*” cried the man, “I thought it was the heretic king trying to escape !”

“Ah ! I see,” said Villa Franca, rising, “you thought you were embracing a sackful of crowns, and you find it likely to prove a bundle of birch. I pity your disappointment, when fortune was so seemingly secure ! Say nothing of your adventure, and here are a few pieces.”

While the Swiss was pocketing his disappointment, Chicot turned the corner ; and the Navarrese wishing to smother what might prove a source of ridicule, declared that he could not have been overtaken, had he not run up against and knocked down the sentinel.

This adventure over, they walked coolly side by side, Villa Franca learning all he could respecting the Fontainebleau prescription, but eluding the inquiries of the jester. Arrived at the palace, the Navarrese noble retired to his chamber to meditate on the accomplishment of the purpose which had brought him to Paris, and which he was determined to put in execution through the opportunity afforded by the royal hunt.

Several days after this affair, Emilie, blushing with the consciousness of the double object of her visit—for it was no longer possible to conceal from herself the interest which she felt for her new friend—entered the picture-gallery of the queen. Villa Franca was not there. However pleasing the feelings which had induced her, as it were in spite of herself, to submit to the admiration which her heart entertained for this

stranger, yet her destiny was so precarious, her prospects so unequal, presenting one day vistas of splendour, and the next a gulf of misery, that she became convinced that seclusion from the world was her fittest portion. She had no friend but Margaret, who, to the grief of both, was unable to dissipate the clouds which lowered over the fortunes of her charge; and though Emilie felt justified in the propriety of accepting the friendship of friends, wherever true friends were to be found to supply the place of her bereavement—for we cannot live isolate and alone in this world of pomp and grief—yet Villa Franca was but an eccentric mystery. She knew nothing more of him, except indeed of the riches of his mind, and a fond hope of its noble nature, than did Margaret and her ladies, among whom he was a frequent topic of discourse, as she discovered when she had occasionally left the solitude of her chamber to join the gay circle in the Queen of Navarre's boudoir. He was there considered the offspring of a banished Sicilian gentleman, who, upon flying his country, had settled at Marseilles, and married what he was mostly in want of—a rich wife, with hoards of money, but without gentility. So far there was a blot in his escutcheon, even in the eyes of mademoiselle. But love might surmount this difficulty. He was presumed rich—that was no consideration. He was called an adventurer—and, in whispers only, a minion and spy of Catherine.

These were terms which might have some influence while a listener to the scandal; but when in the presence of Villa Franca, looking upon his noble features, which in repose, when the god of mirth had forsook his lips, wore an air of calm dignity and open-hearted integrity, she thought only of these disparaging surmises as the inevitable result of the career of an envied favourite. He scarcely ever talked of himself; his imagination was too full of vivid creations, which at times seemed to hide the consciousness of his own being.

In these seasons he lived only in his imagination, but Emilie was ever an inhabitant of that region.

These were the fond excuses which she framed for his silence on the subject of his own connexions and history; nor could she feel displeased, as her own conduct in this particular had been equally reserved. Catherine had even forced her—nor could the Queen of Navarre help it—to make a solemn vow, before she entered the palace, that she would conceal from every one, even her confessor, had not the cordelier, who

was the confessor of Margaret, known every particular—her history, name, and rank.

Thus situated, she could not consistently accuse Villa Franca of reserve; yet she could not help feeling, that as he had made no vow of secrecy, he would have increased the confidence which was fast growing between them, had he dwelt sometimes on himself, his family—the hopes and fears which beset his path.

Above all, it was a question whether he was worthy of the feelings which she entertained for him; whether he might be trusted so far as her confidence could extend. Upon the resolution of these questions she staked the continuance of their intimacy. He was either worthy of all the confidence which she could repose in him, or she ought to forsake his society and proffered attentions. There was no medium; for the delicacy of her station admitted not of casual acquaintance such as might spring up in the Louvre. A friend who would peril his liberty, if not life, in her cause, might at one period or another be of vital service. Her foe was Catherine; and, alas! Villa Franca was one of the most zealous of the queen's friends.

It was while reflecting on this subject that she saw the favourite enter the gallery with a look of deeper meaning than usual.

"You appear serious, monseigneur," said Emilie, willing to relieve his embarrassment.

"And yet I bring gay news for ladies of every rank, from the poor chatelaine of Auvergne or Limousin to the princesses of the blood. There is to be," said he, "a masquerade to-night in the great hall of the palace."

"Your news is very old," said Emilie, laughing; "I have seen many of the dresses."

"Will mademoiselle be present?" said he, looking anxiously.

"In truth I may not," replied Emilie, sighing, her memory recurring to her previous reflections. "I, who have not ventured to break a solemn promise by telling you my name, cannot, you may suppose, appear in the company of all the noblesse now in Paris."

There was a struggle of contending emotions in the breast of the young man. Since his adventure with Chicot, he had received, by a private hand, letters from the south, upbraiding him with delay. These he had communicated to Navarre; and it had been resolved that the king should ask permission to assist at the royal hunting-party—permission would no doubt

be granted as on former occasions—and the chief of the Bourbons might by this means escape. He swore to the baron that he would not return alive to the Louvre. His sovereign free, De Nevaillles was determined no longer to submit to concealment; the imputation of spy and minion which buzzed about his ears was too galling to be endured any longer than the strictest necessity required.

But alas! he could not fly from the Louvre with the same freedom of mind with which he had entered it—it contained one room pleasanter to him than the whole world besides—one being its occasional tenant, dearer than the whole human race. Yet the time was at hand when he must part from her.

"And I," exclaimed he, "am about to quit Paris and its noblesse."

"Do you travel far?" asked Emilie, trying to conceal, under this simple question, her emotion.

"I do not know," replied he, with a mysterious smile, as he thought on the chances of the impending war; "but I do not come back."

"What, leave the queen's service!" cried the damsel.

He started from her side, laughing involuntarily. Alarmed at his abruptness, she watched him cross the chamber; but when he turned round, his features were composed. He had made his decision, and resolved to trust her with his secret. Bending over her, lest he should be heard, he said—

"I am no servant of the queen's.—Do you pity the captive King of Navarre?"

"We are both prisoners under the same jailer," replied Emilie, looking on the ground.

"I hold my land and castle of him," continued Villa Franca: "in Navarre I am the Baron de Nevaillles; and here, in Paris, I am bound to free him from captivity."

Emilie started with surprise; she looked up to the baron, but could not speak.

"I am now in your power, mademoiselle," said Villa Franca.

"I wish it were mine to return this confidence as freely as it has been bestowed," said Emilie, pensively.

"There is one question you can answer without breaking any vow."

She looked up.

"Will the Baron de Nevaillles have a place in your memory—will he carry with him the consciousness that in the midst of his enemies, he has left behind one heart which will not sneer at

his eccentricities, and revile him as a spy?" exclaimed the baron, pleading with his eyes as well as with a faltering tongue.

"He will leave behind one," said Emilie, "who could see the chivalry of France beneath the dress of the foreign adventurer—and who could pardon the disguise for the loyalty which prompted it."

"Then he is happy," exclaimed De Nevailles.

We dare not pursue this conversation farther, though our manuscript authorities would carry us on—lest the simplicity which meetings such as these elicit, interesting only to the lovers themselves, should detract too much from the dignity of one for whom we have a great esteem. The diplomatist and the warrior, the conqueror in the senate, and the conqueror of nations, are mere children when subdued by love; they cry for, and are pleased with, their object, as a child with its toy. Our taste is sterner. In place of the transcription, let the reader imagine the looks, the sighs, and avowals—the long pause of silence when the heart is too full for utterance, and sits brooding over its joy, and gazing on its treasure. These are the universal characteristics. Let us suppose these passed away, as if they had never been recorded in our old manuscript; not gone utterly away, but sunk deep into the hearts of the lovers, and become part and parcel of their existence. De Nevailles had a favour to ask; it was to have restored to him the portrait which Emilie had snatched away in their first interview.

"I am not certain," replied the lady, "that I can restore it."

"Worse and worse!" exclaimed an angry voice from behind the screen—the lovers started in dismay, and the Queen of Navarre, who having been astonished at the repeated visits of her *protégée* to Catherine's quarter of the palace, and become suspicious of the queen-mother tampering with her, more especially as Emilie never communicated the cause of her visit, had resolved on listening to the secret conference—now issued from her concealment.—"So we are to lose the pleasure of your society, baron!" said Margaret, sneeringly, to Villa Franca, "and you, mademoiselle, venture to retain the baron's valuables—as a memento I suppose?"

Emilie could not lift up her eyes to meet the glance of the enraged queen—and Villa Franca stood like a mute in the chamber, deeming it prudent not to interrupt her rage.

"Has your care, baron," cried Margaret, "extended to the consort of your liege? have you made provision for *her* journey?"

"I durst not be so cruel," replied the young man, assuming a portion of the reckless spirit which had heretofore assisted him in danger,—“the absence of the Queen of Hearts would have been the death of half the court.”

"And yet, monseigneur," cried the queen, still more angrily, to conceal the habitual influence of the sweet incense of flattery, "you are cruel enough to attempt robbing me of my — *protégée*. But it is yet to be seen whether a spy, and a companion of spies and professed fools, a man who has lived and thrived by his smiles and abrupt sayings—shall pluck from me one who claims my protection."

"Your majesty," said De Nevailles, in alarm, lest the heightened utterance of the queen should be overheard, "may bring evil upon your charge, by awakening the anger of your parent."

"The queen shall judge between us!" exclaimed Margaret, with a ferocious spirit; nor could the entreaties of Emilie, who clung to her, prevent the offended princess from opening the door of the ante-room and desiring the lady in waiting to request the queen's presence.

Villa Franca made up his mind for the worst; his eye was upon the outer door, though he remained immoveable, and did not attempt to escape. Catherine entered, and looking upon the strange group, said—

"A larger audience than I expected."

"I claim justice of your majesty," said Margaret. Catherine looked upon the pale but composed features of her adviser with surprise.

"Monsieur Villa Franca," said the Queen of Navarre, casting a look of contempt and triumph upon her victim, "claims the precedence of an audience with your majesty!"

"Villa Franca," replied Catherine, "mistakes our favour in supposing that he is nearer to us than our royal daughter. He may retire till to-morrow morning. Are you satisfied with our decision?" continued the queen, smiling at Margaret. Her daughter assented.

"The King of Navarre is right and I am wrong," muttered the baron to himself, as he yielded to Catherine's command, and left her presence. "His consort is indeed our good ally!"

CHAPTER XIII.

——— Take heed,
Treason's a race that must be run with speed.

OLD PLAY.

It is now time for us to return to one who has the highest claim on the reader's attention, but who has been long kept from his sight through the importance of other matters. The project of the Duke D'Alençon to raise a foreign army, together with the timely arrival of De Nevaillies, with news of an intended rising in the south, had contributed to rouse Navarre from the lethargy which had subdued his youthful spirit. That capricious beauty, his wife, upon quarrelling with her royal parent—and not before—found a sympathy, as we have shown, for her neglected consort; and partly out of revenge to her mother, and partly through some feeling of caprice or other motive,—for who can account for all the actions of a woman?—had often prompted him to escape from the fangs of Catherine, and promised her assistance in the execution.

She was aware of the nature of D'Alençon's enterprise, though both he and Navarre concealed the agency of Villa Franca in that business; indeed, the latter had comported himself so skilfully, that she considered him in the light of an enemy and a spy upon her consort. And though the imprisoned king had often hinted to the baron the proffered services of Margaret, yet he always dissuaded his liege from availing himself of her aid, or disclosing the secret of his rank.

Of late, as Villa Franca had become secretly attached to his unknown innamorata, and in consequence suffered the business of his sovereign to languish, Navarre had listened with more attention to the importunities of his queen to escape from the Louvre.

When she returned from Catherine's picture-gallery, full of her recent discovery, her first object was to find out her husband, that she might revenge herself for his want of confidence by striking as great a terror into his soul as she had already inflicted upon his servant. He was in the gardens of the

Tuileries taking the air, and amusing himself by keeping on the side nearest the Seine; ever and anon casting a wistful eye upon the boats which passed to and fro. This occupation caused him to be watched by numerous eyes from all quarters of the garden; and so eluding, deceiving, and sometimes gliding out of sight of the guards, he passed that time in amusement which his suffering brethren in faith earnestly implored him to employ in flying to their succour. But his hour of trial was near at hand.

"Is not this folly," exclaimed Margaret, upon approaching the idle monarch, "for your majesty to train these men to vigilance, when their negligence will best favour you at the Fontainebleau hunting-party?"

"What of Fontainebleau?" said Navarre, turning pale, but endeavouring to hide his discomfiture; "you must have been at my chamber-door listening to my speech in dreams, for I have no waking knowledge of any hunting-party."

"You may as well throw yourself into the river at once," retorted Margaret; "for the Navarrese Baron de Nevailles has come to Paris single-handed to liberate you from thralldom. He has conquered all the dwarfs, and slaves, and young brood of serpents which surrounded the tower where his sovereign lay imprisoned. He has gained admittance; but has yet to vanquish the great dragon—and that is beyond his strength."

"Do they say so in the palace, or is the fancy confined to your breast?" said the alarmed king, eying his consort with suspicion.

"Give me your word that you will never question either the baron or myself respecting the mode by which I gained his secret—and you shall know all," said Margaret.

Navarre readily promised.

"Then," exclaimed the queen, "the truth still lurks about the Louvre, concealed from all but my fairy eyes. Now throw aside your alarm, and receive with composure yonder daily guest."

It was the Marshal de Biron, who now approached with an invitation from the Queen of France for the King of Navarre to attend the evening festivities. The marshal came slowly along the avenue, cursing all promenades, alleys, public squares, and other open places—and wishing the gardens were as intricate as a wood.

"I can turn a corner very gracefully," said the marshal, deprecating his slow lengthened movements, "or even dance

the Pavanne; but these promenades must have been constructed by her majesty on purpose to annoy me."

"If I were a Marshal of France," said Navarre, "I should hold the inconvenience lightly."

The marshal then delivered his message, descanting at some length upon the aid which his classical learning had afforded the Princess of Condé in the construction and machinery of her ballets. As it was known that the Duke of Guise was assembling an army in the eastern provinces, Catherine had thought fit, in her usual politic strain, to show a marked courtesy to Navarre, lest circumstances should oblige her to let loose the caged lion.

When evening came, and the captive descended to the hall of the *cent Suisses*, the queen received him very graciously. This saloon, though not the largest, was certainly the *chef d'œuvre* of the palace: Lescot the architect, and Goujon the sculptor, had employed their united skill in contributing to its splendour. At one end was a tribune, in front of which were performed the ballets and histrionic amusements of the court; at the opposite end was seen the choicest specimen of the sculptor's skill in the workmanship of four Caryatides which adorned the walls—between the two centre figures was placed the entrance-door of the hall.

Within this noble saloon were congregated the wiser portion of the court; leaving Valois and many of his friends to enjoy themselves in fasting at Grandmontans. There was a hush of expectation among the guests when the silk curtains were drawn aside, and disclosed to view a tolerably picturesque representation of Pluto's domain in the shades below.

"What is the subject, marshal?" said Candales, who, when her betrothed, the Duke D'Espernon, was present, was ever trying to excite his jealousy of De Biron.

"Ceres, and her daughter Proserpine," replied the flattered soldier, "but dreadfully out of proportion with tradition; nothing like the classic story, as you will perceive—Condé was obstinate; she takes the outline from me, and then adopts her own ideas of improvement without consulting my judgment."

Candales thanked him with a look which said, had it been sincere, that she would have been more grateful than the princess.

As the ballet proceeded, the marshal, in explanation to his fair auditors, said—

"Proserpine being carried below, Ceres and her train follow,

making the lower region unnaturally bright to an admirer of the heathen Tartarus."

"Ay, and to an admirer of earth," said D'Espernon, who had escaped with several of the brethren from the convent, "when so many fair creatures leave its surface!"

The interpreter, who, while paying devout attention to the countess, omitted no respect to royalty, casting a contemptuous look at his interrupter, said to Catherine:—"In the plan laid for the escape of Proserpine, two of Ceres' nymphs attempt to seduce the vigilance of Pluto—now let your majesty witness the attempt!"

The scene represented a garden in Tartarus; a bower with Proserpine asleep in it; and Pluto, the grim god, keeping watch over his treasure. Two nymphs enter stealthily from behind the bower on the left hand of the scene. A burst of enthusiasm arose from the audience when they beheld Condé tripping forward, followed by her sister nymph. The princess was not a beautiful woman, but her dark eye, full of meaning, and her swarthy complexion, together with a certain air of wildness, realized to the full the idea of a bacchante; ripened ears of corn mixed with wild flowers, formed a fillet for the hair which hung clustering beneath.

Followed by the other nymph, in similar costume, she tripped across the garden with the intent of engaging the attention of Pluto—letting fall her scarf, which was instantly picked up by the enamoured deity, who, forgetful of Proserpine asleep in the bower, runs across the garden and prevents her retreat; insisting either on throwing it around her neck himself, or receiving it as a present from her hands, to remind him, in her absence, of the daughters of earth.

"I had no idea that ugly god was so full of tender sentiment," said Candales, looking at the marshal.

"Truly, a Gallic Pluto," said De Biron, with an air of gallantry; "betraying his origin in a country where beauty sits enthroned!"

"Marshal!" said Navarre, whispering to him, "gallantly done! You take aim on both sides at once!"

"If your majesty will turn your head, you will behold the fair De Sauves!" retorted the marshal.

This reply to Navarre was not spoken so low but that it was heard by many, and caused a laugh among the circle who knew his partiality for that fair lady.

This was the hour of triumph for Condé. Affecting petulance, she caught hold of her scarf, and with the assistance of

her fellow-nymph, attempted to regain her treasure. What a trampling of pretty feet ! The princess, a graceful woman in the ripened lustre of her charms, and her companion—more insinuating, coaxing, and persuasive—a smiling girl peeping with her cunning eyes at the old immortal through the unloosened tresses fallen over her face ! He will not part with the prize ! No ! not while it is held by such lovely hands !

“ Marshal de Biron,” cried Navarre, who was in his best humour,—“ would not the touch of that scarf thrill through your frame ? ”

“ Yes ! ” said De Biron, vexed at being disturbed.

“ It might cure his lameness ! ” muttered D’Espernon.

As the nymphs are entangling the god in the scarf, and distracting his attention from the bower, Ceres enters and awakens Proserpine, who starts up and throws herself into her mother’s arms. The train of the goddess crowd around the bower ; Ceres and her daughter escape. Pluto, by the acuteness of his divine faculties, becomes aware that evil is impending—he looks earnestly at the bower. Condé makes signs that she will wrap the scarf round the sleeping Proserpine as a bridal present ; the god remains stationary, watching the nymph, who bends over the bower—still partially hidden by Ceres’s train—apparently performing her promise. Nothing could equal the grace and nature with which she retired—by her gesture inviting the god to claim his captive bride. For a while, he seems fascinated with the movements of Condé, but as she retreats off the scene, he rushes to the bower—the nymphs stand aside, and to his despair, he beholds neither fair one nor scarf !

The nymphs shout with laughter, which is echoed by Condé, who waves the scarf among the foliage in the background. Pluto, in a truly infernal rage, threatens to engulf them all in a dismal lake—when on a sudden, the stout Duke of Bouillon, resuscitated and well, dropped from the skies as the god Mercury ! The audience laughed at the portly messenger of Heaven ; the nymphs laughed, we suppose, for their deliverance ; and Pluto laughed, perchance, through vexation ; but certainly every one exhibited signs of mirth. Bouillon, however, succeeded in establishing a treaty of peace ; and happiness reigned over the regions below.

Next followed an historical mask, in which Candales, D’Espernon, and De Biron added their histrionic talents, to the amusement of the court. But no after performance could efface from the memory of the audience the grace and witchery of the princess. She was worthy the homage of Europe.

After her ballet, she had stolen into the hall so silently, that Navarre, who was sitting next the queen, wondering that he had not before noticed the lady almost hidden on the other side of her majesty, found, to his surprise, that it was Condé.

This was a quiet entertainment compared to that which followed. The grand hall of the palace, lit up with a brilliancy surpassing the serene lamp of day, was thrown open to an innumerable crowd of masks, who were honoured with a self-display of their incongruities at the queen's masquerade. This species of amusement was then a novelty in Europe, but quite as well understood as at present. The characters consisted of the types of every rank and profession, besides grotesque inventions and mental personifications; an epitome of the world, huddled together in defiance of the laws of order and precedency. It was a reign of equality, in which the actors preserved the insignia of rank without its privileges: the disguises, however, were but in very few instances sufficient, effectually, to conceal the masker; yet the charm was as great—perhaps more so—as any one might address the queen or the family of France without ceremony. Truths might be told without offence or reprimand, provided they assumed the garb of pleasantry.

The Queen of Navarre and Madame D'Usez were apparelled in the costume of nuns, and threaded the maze of the various groups, seemingly intent on religious abstraction and holy converse. The laughter of the crowd was presently elicited by their coming in contact with a Genevese preacher, in his black gown and scull-cap. Though true faith and heresy met without their temporal fangs, yet a remnant of rivalry still existed.

"Where have you come from?" said D'Usez.

"From Geneva," replied the preacher.

"And never ventured northward before?" asked Margaret.

"I should have been in danger from the holy men of your religion, but for this carnival of peace," rejoined the Genevese.

"And what may your fancy think of us Parisians, apart from our cruelty?" said D'Usez.

"Were both masks removed," replied the preacher, "I should say your beauty contrasted like day and night!"

The crowd laughed at this reply, which indicated that the preacher knew, or imagined he knew, the nuns.

"Which is to be preferred?" asked the queen.

"Day is beautiful beyond compare," replied the sectarian.

"and her re-appearance more charming from the sweet interval of night."

"The crowd increased.

"They read poetry in Geneva, I find," said D'Usez.

"They have breathing forms which inspire poetry," replied the other.

"To which," replied D'Usez, "the darkness you attribute to one of us, and the brightness of the other, are but reminiscences, I suppose."

"The reminiscences of my dreams alone," said the preacher.

"Then we are the realization of a fable!" exclaimed the Queen of Navarre.

"The moral of which teaches me," said the preacher, "not to believe, as I had done before I met your sweet presences, that I had already seen the perfection of beauty."

"Then," replied D'Usez, triumphantly, and expecting to confuse her antagonist, "if the moral be worth any thing, it teaches you that you will yet see brighter luminaries than ourselves."

"Yes," rejoined the preacher; "and the hope I have of passing into another world confirms it."

"And—" exclaimed his antagonist—but she was interrupted by the hideous roar of a bull, which, bursting suddenly upon the ears of the group, scattered them in dismay. And Margaret, dragging off the duchess, said, "Allow him the victory, madame: he deserves it!"

The preacher made a shrewd guess at the identity of the bull which had gained him a victory; but, had it not been for a previous hint, he would never have expected such a sound to proceed from a mask personating Queen Elizabeth. Her majesty was tolerably well represented, according to the prints then circulating in France; the chief difficulty lay in the waist of Chicot, which was not slim enough. The preacher, without more ado, went off, arm-in-arm, with the island queen; while a tall cardinal shouted out, "*Mon Dieu!* that wicked woman always delivers the heretics out of our grasp!"

The united heresy of England and France caused such a ferment in the assembly, and her heretic majesty was received with so much clamour, that she was glad to disappear, and leave the less conspicuous Huguenot to his fate.

Every one was aware of the quality of an old beggar, who limped about the assembly, asking alms of each female in a quaint rhyming couplet. No one replied to his satisfaction.

Some were courteous; others flippant; and many satirical. He was evidently in search of one who could respond in the same key to his challenge. The surprise of the company was equal to that of himself, when they beheld, almost in juxtaposition with the marshal—our readers must have guessed, ere this, the rank of the mendicant—another lame beggar, not alone, but accompanied by a market-girl, with whom he was limping along in whispering chat.

“Two beggars in the field!” cried a tall, stout butcher, who had been amusing the group with a dissertation on lamb; “and only one crust between them!”

“And that has already become a bone of contention,” exclaimed a mask.

In fact, the marshal, in high dudgeon, struggled up to the counterfeit beggar, and planting himself in his path, repeated his rhyming challenge to the girl, who answered in the same fashion. This set the old general in a flame.

“Who are you, Monsieur Mendicant?” said he, in a rougher tone than his politeness would have allowed in the apparel of a gentleman.

“As great an impostor as yourself,” replied the other, in a feigned voice.

“*Ma foi!*” exclaimed the marshal, restraining his anger, “you must accompany me, or surrender up the fair lady at your side.”

“You both wear swords, no doubt, as beggars do now-a-days!” cried the old butcher.

“I have used a crutch, sometimes,—since the battle of Dreux,” said the feigned voice.

“*Sacre!* this is too much! I never used any other crutch, you villain, than the arm of the prince who helped me to my tent!” so saying, the marshal caught hold of the impostor, and tearing off his mask, displayed the moon-face of the jester. A loud and hearty peal of laughter drowned the resentment of De Biron. Chicot ran off without limping. In the confusion, the lady accepted the protection of the cardinal, and escaped. This was another source of laughter; and the marshal, enraged at his loss, gave chase to the flying beggar, who eluded him a long time successfully.

A lame beggar running after a nimble one, stopped every other amusement; and the crowd maliciously giving room to Chicot, and closing behind him, the pursuit continued till the marshal was chafed as a wild beast. But the favour of the crowd is never to be depended on; it had received ample amuse-

ment from the chace—it now required the excitement of the struggle ; and in consequence, blocked up the retreat of the jester, who was speedily captured by his dire foe. As the only means of escaping punishment, Chicot confessed that he had overheard the assignation : and having been driven out of the farthingale of Queen Elizabeth, he had assumed the mendicant, and been beforehand with the lady. The worst part of the adventure was, that the marshal had altogether lost the countess, who made her peace with the cardinal.

The attention of the company, however, was suddenly drawn to the music, which began a slow measured air. It was the signal for the pavanne—a stately dance, well suited to a masquerade, as no dress was too heavy or cumbersome for the step and figure. All joined in the diversion ;—the solemn cardinal, the robed lawyer, the trained princess, the small merchant with his basket of wares, the scull-capped Huguenot and the heavy butcher. It was a sort of measured tread ; and the floor resounded with a noise like that caused by the march of troops. But on a sudden, the strain changed—the notes of a lively coranto echoed through the hall—the pavanne turned to a quick galliard ; and the company, changing their solemn steps for the brisker movements, in accordance with the new air, it seemed as though so many figures of tapestry were starting into life.

But from this diversion the Huguenot preacher was suddenly called away by Chicot, who whispered in his ear that the queen had sent several messengers after him, who had been unable to penetrate his disguise. The Huguenot obeyed and left the hall. Chicot gave him into the hands of Davila ; and in spite of all remonstrances, the usher would not allow time for a change of dress, but carried the favourite direct to the cabinet of the queen.

“ Her majesty has been waiting for you a long time, and is quite angry with the delay,” exclaimed the usher.

“ Is it news of good or evil ?” said the Huguenot to himself, in apprehension of the latter.

When the usher left the room, Villa Franca looking round, saw that Villeroi, the secretary, was present. The Huguenot awaited her majesty’s speech, rather surprised that she seemed so unwilling to notice him. He bowed a second time.

“ Is it the learned Beza or the argumentative Du Plessis-Mornay who now stands before me ?” said Catherine. These were the names of two celebrated theological chiefs of the Huguenots ; the former of whom had, as it happened, been well

known to the Baron de Nevailles, at Geneva ; the baron was fond of calling himself his pupil, having sedulously attended his public discourses, and listened in private to his erudite and pious admonitions. Villa Franca made apology for his inadvertence, and took off the mask.

"Wear your cap by all means," said Catherine, "it reminds me of the days when your brother heretics tried to persuade me of their infallibility."

"It is whispered," rejoined Villa Franca, "that your majesty was wont to call them black gudgeon ; and that they bit eagerly at the chance of converting a queen."

Catherine, however, was in no humour for mirth ; she had received intimation that the Duke of Guise had marched northward from Dijon ; and that it was probable he would be joined by the Lorrainese forces. But their chief object in sending for Villa Franca was to consult with him respecting a despatch which Villeroy had received from the Governor of Languedoc.

It stated that the governor had received information that a certain Bearnese noble—the Baron de Nevailles—who had been for several years past intriguing for the Huguenot party in Geneva and the south of France, had gone to Paris with the intention of opening a correspondence with the King of Navarre. In addition to his cautioning the secretary, the governor said that he had sent the despatch by a courier who was acquainted with the person of the baron.

The Huguenot scarcely breathed during the period that Villeroy was occupied in reading this intelligence. Happening to look at the queen, he saw that her eye was fixed on him—it was accidental—but he changed colour.

"What has struck you ?" exclaimed the queen, noticing the change ;—"first thoughts are always the happiest."

"I was only thinking," replied the favourite, "that monseigneur the governor never does things by halves. The idea of sending a man who knew the person of the baron was a happy thought."

"It is just as I have ever told you, monseigneur." These heretics will never be quiet till they are all cropped and garnered like corn. Is not monseigneur of my opinion ?

"Decidedly," answered Villa Franca ; "yet I differ with you as to the mode :—but this Baron de Nevailles, he must have been some time at Paris. I have heard him mentioned in the south."

"Madame D'Usez learned some particulars of his history
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when she was at D'Usez a year since," said Catherine. "He is very young and reckless, and will run into the very teeth of danger. But he has talents which promise much."

It might, perhaps, be instanced as a proof of this recklessness, that the baron ventured a slight bow for the compliment. It was not, however, noticed.

"Let us lose no time in securing De Nevailles," said Villa Franca; "he may be placed safely in the Bastile without any one knowing any thing about it."

"Where shall we find him?" asked the secretary.

"Put the courier into the hands of some of our friends," replied the young man, looking significantly at the queen, "and the baron will soon be found out."

"Villeroi," said Catherine, "make out an order for Le Clerc to receive the baron in our prison of the Bastile."

The old secretary retired for a few minutes to get possession of his seal: in the interval, Villa Franca, who was aware that Villeroi was not intrusted with the secret of Poulain's adventures, lest he should betray them to Guise, said—

"Nicholas will soon find out the baron;—let us send to his house immediately."

"House," exclaimed Catherine, laughing, "he is in the hall—a fellow mummer with yourself—I set him there to keep a strict eye on Navarre."

"And the courier?"

"At Villeroi's hotel," replied Catherine.

"Who would take the pains that I do," said Villa Franca inwardly, "to arrest himself? Yet let me consider—I am now rushing on—without seeing the outlet to the channel."

"You are right," said Catherine, after a pause, "Poulain is a better man than the Governor of the Bastile. Placing the courier in Nicholas's hands will be putting a ferret into the hands of a rat-catcher."

The self-confidence of Villa Franca began to waver as he thought of the possibility of being in good earnest conveyed to the Bastile. And when Villeroi returned with the seal, he looked on the paper with more than ordinary curiosity, and cursed the Governor of Languedoc for sending such a plague.

"I was almost tempted to make out another *lettre de cachet*!" said the secretary.

"For whom?" exclaimed the young man, quickly.

"For the King of Navarre himself," replied Villeroi; "he would be much safer in the Bastile."

"You will never learn our policy," said the queen-mother;

"my son has sent an invitation to Navarre to join the hunting-party at Fontainebleau. What say you to that?"

The secretary shook his head.

"What say you, Villa Franca?" cried the queen.

"Destroy him by sloth and luxury," replied the Huguenot. "Place him in close confinement, and he will mourn over his fallen fortunes, and in his rage break through walls of stone! But continue to him the pleasures he now enjoys, and you will complete the breaking up of the martial spirit of his ancestors. He never thinks beyond the Louvre, except when he is crossed in some purpose of amusement. Madame de Sauves might pin him to her farthingale as easily as she would a lap dog!"

"Well said!" exclaimed the queen, "he shall hunt every week at Fontainebleau, with proper guidance; but D'Espernon tells me, that my poor son is now almost afraid of venturing out to the chase. He unluckily recollected what had happened to his ancestors."

Villa Franca looked to the queen for an explanation. Ville-roi had heard the legend before, but listened with the attention of a courtier. It was briefly as follows:—The French kings had sometimes, when hunting in the royal forest, been led away by a false cry of hounds and horns, imagining the noise to proceed from their own party, from whom they had become separated. Presently, as it had often happened, swept by hounds and huntsmen in full chase; some one of the visionary party staying to speak to or warn the monarch, who heard both the words addressed to him as well as the cry of hounds—though unable to hear the tread of either horses or dogs. Such was the account narrated by several of the French monarchs, who had always reason to respect the warning. The peasants sometimes heard the supernatural cries, but had never caught sight of any portion of the hunt.

In narrating the legend, Catherine seemed to believe there was some truth in it, though she wished the superstition banished from the mind of her son.

"D'Espernon," said she, "has rallied him completely from these fears, though he may have a relapse. The attempt on his life, together with his abstinence, has fevered his mind and weakened his body. Navarre is fond of the chase, and having been of late in good spirits, will help to cure my son of this weakness and superstition."

"It was a fearful thing for a man to meet," said the old secretary.

"The narration has, however, had a good effect on Villa Franca," rejoined the queen-mother ; "he was looking very ill but just now."

"And yet tolerably well for a man who sees the order for his own imprisonment," thought the baron.

"Since I have been out," said Villeroi, "I have ordered the courier to be sent here to the palace, that we may examine him."

"Rather too quick that," thought the favourite, walking across the cabinet to hide his emotion.—He stopped before a mirror.

"I look pale," said the young noble, eying himself during his soliloquy, "and I feel my coward blood playing a coward's part. Yet my eye is clear, my brow unruffled, my lips as firm and compressed as though there were no such things in the world as danger and merriment—my two enemies ! I scarcely now know what to do—but fate must point out that. I must seem to draw this courier closer to me, though I wish him in the Biscay waters. What a disaster ! The costume of a Huguenot preacher ought to include sword or stiletto for my sake. I am unarmed !—and the chance may come to that."

He was aroused from these reflections by a laugh. Catherine had pointed out to the secretary the situation of her favourite, looking at himself like another Narcissus. He turned round and bowed.

"There are hopes of reformation for this heretic," said Catherine, addressing Villeroi ; "heresy has only half his heart—the other half is given up to vanity. He is lamenting the loss of the clustering locks of youth."

"Would my former friends recognise me in this cap and gown ?" said Villa Franca.

"O ! there is no mistaking that profile," rejoined the queen, "even if you were in the clutches of the fallen angel."

"Then I must look my friends full in front, and save my reputation," replied the young man, with more meaning than met the ear.

There was a species of obstinacy or self-willed courage in his mental constitution, of which he was conscious only in moments of extreme danger, and which kept him fascinated to the post of danger in spite of his better judgment. He was aware that a man was now on his way to the palace who had been sent across the kingdom for the sole purpose of detecting his presence in Paris ; he had himself, in his capacity of adviser to her majesty, and by a volition which he could not see clearly the effects of, dictated the surest means by which his identity

might be discovered ; yet with this peril awaiting his stay in the queen's cabinet, prudence could not force him to make any excuse for leaving it ! He stood there firmly, though not quietly, as if his hour were not come. His mental eye saw beyond the narrow walls, and his heart told him his body should be there also. But no ! he could not go ! He had always conquered by conflict, and never through flight. When the arrow was aimed at him, he neither ran away nor hid himself, but stood prepared to parry it with his weapon, and stand or fall by the issue. He looked leisurely on Catherine, and summed up the entire volume of power of which the woman in the chair before him was the executive minister. It was a war between a mortal and the lightning-armed Jupiter. He looked on Villeroi ; a carking, avaricious old counsellor—his lip wreathed with contempt, but there was power there too.

He heard footsteps approaching. He quitted his station near the mirror, and placed himself with his back towards the door, looking Catherine in the face, and in the attitude of awaiting her commands. The moments were awful to himself—but he saw not their widest scope—they were indeed charged with the destinies of empires, of a purer faith, and liberty to mankind.

The speaking shadow Davila, preceded and announced the courier ; the man entered, and the usher retired. The Huguenot durst not look round, yet not to do so would appear something beyond eccentricity.

" Well, François !" said Villeroi, " you were born in a lucky hour for earning gold—but you look afraid of her majesty. Courage ! you must even talk with her !"

Villa Franca still continued to hold the mask in his hand ; and when Catherine, after surveying the man from head to foot, turned upon her favourite, he could only lift up the mask, shrug up his shoulders, and smile. But this simple movement, thrown out at random, had a wonderful effect. She made a sign for the favourite to approach closer.

" True, I had forgotten our masker !" whispered the queen. " Poulain must not quit the palace. I gave him the dress of a Florentine gentleman—no satire was intended—haste and seek him out—bid him tell the marshal or Grillon to fasten their eyes upon Navarre—and let him await in the ante-chamber till I have got rid of Villeroi."

Villa Franca bowed to the queen—put the mask on his face—surveyed the courier, whose face was familiar to him—and left the cabinet.

"It will end in death some of these days!" said the baron to himself as he descended the stairs.

The scene in the hall was as noisy and mirthful as when he quitted it; but he had no heart for the folly. By the time he reached the foot of the staircase, his plans were matured; he had now only to put them in instant execution. Navarre he was afraid of speaking to for obvious reasons. In this dilemma, he blessed the discovery which Margaret had made in the morning—for her conduct had confirmed him in his liege's belief of her readiness to assist them. He contrived to lead her away from her friends without being observed. His language was abrupt—

"Our morning conference has made your majesty aware, that though I am reckoned at the Louvre a zealous Catholic—yet in reality, this costume is nearer the mark of my faith."

Margaret assented.

"The Governor of Languedoc has heard from his spies among our party, that I am in Paris," continued De Nevaillès; "there is at this moment in the queen's cabinet a man sent from him on purpose to identify my person. They suppose I am concealed in the city. I was present when he was introduced—his face is known to me, and therefore I must be well known to the varlet—my mask saved me."

"What have you done?" asked the queen in great alarm.

He recounted his adventure, omitting the name and occupation of Poulain, for that was a secret of rare importance between himself and his royal mistress. He then informed her, in as few words as possible, the course which Navarre and herself were to pursue—by which his liege's liberation would be gained: he also instructed her in what she should say of himself to her royal parent.

"There is one other subject," said the baron with a faltering tongue:—"you are the guardian of a treasure—"

"Of which you would have robbed me, monseigneur," replied Margaret, interrupting him—and I have but few real friends in this wide palace. Of her I can say nothing—promise nothing—your own life shows that God's destiny governs the world—her fate is not more secure. I will, however, tell her she need not go to the picture-gallery again."

The approach of several masks put an end to their conversation. De Nevaillès was forced to part with this faint hope. The moments were precious.

His next object was the Florentine gentleman, whom he speedily

recognised, and making a detour, came upon him unawares, and in apparent agitation—

“Your sword, Nicholas—no hesitation, I pray,—you are the cause of the quarrel—unhook it, it is not your own.”

The mask of the spy had no sympathy with its owner, or it must have stared strangely at this abrupt attack. Nicholas recognised the voice, but he could not account for the request or the familiarity. In a few words, Villa Franca explained the queen’s object, and gave Poulain as good instructions how to act in the search as the most faithful counsellor would have done. He then informed the spy—and this was a most important step—that in looking for him, he had encountered and quarrelled with a gentleman in the hall—that words of defiance and a blow had passed between them—that the affair could not be arranged within the precincts of the palace—that he must lend him his sword, and say nothing about it to her majesty.

Affairs of this kind were too much a matter of course for Poulain to be surprised at, or attempt to interfere. He surrendered his weapon, and went to seek De Biron. Seizing this opportunity, Villa Franca regained his own chamber—changed his *dress*, but took the masquerade costume with him—put money in his pocket—left his own rapier in his chamber—wrapped himself up in his cloak, and escaping from the palace, underwent without remark the scrutiny of the guards who formed a cordon round the prison of his liege—and knowing the password, got clear out of the city.

CHAPTER XIV.

————— O care !

That keeps the ports of slumber open wide,
To many a watchful night. O majesty !
When thou dost pinch thy bearer, thou dost sit
Like a rich armour, worn in heat of day,
That scalds with safety.

CATHERINE did not reappear in the hall, and the guests were left to amuse themselves as they might ; but it was not known in the palace till the morrow that any circumstance had occurred to disturb her serenity.

She could not in any way account for the disappearance of Villa Franca, yet trusted that the next day would restore him to her counsels, and retired to rest much displeased with his rudeness. But when the meridian of the ensuing day arrived, and brought not the favourite, her displeasure changed to fear—and as his absence soon became talked of throughout the Louvre, a strict search became necessary. To add to the mystery, his apparel, arms, and other valuables remained undisturbed ; the rapier was found just where it might naturally have been placed on his assuming the clerical garb. The dress of the Huguenot minister was nowhere to be seen, which proved, beyond a doubt, that his absence arose from a sudden or involuntary cause. The guards were all questioned—perhaps one or two of their number might have thrown some light on the matter, but a fear of getting into trouble undeservedly, and a consciousness that no one under restraint had been allowed to escape, kept them silent—all denied knowledge of the absent gentleman.

In this dilemma, her majesty summoned De Biron to her cabinet for advice and consolation.

"I am afraid, marshal," said the queen, "that some tool of Guise has cut him off. It may be a plan to rid me of my council one by one, that I may appear at last like an old tree lopped of its branches. My son escaped—but Villa Franca, alas ! has fallen—it may be your turn next. Can you read your fate, De Biron ?" continued she, with a grim smile.

"One part only," replied the marshal, his well-worn face overspread with a manly tint which the heart sent as a token of its fidelity; "I shall, through the blessing of our holy faith, die in your majesty's service. For the rest, Gontaud De Biron fears neither assassin nor open violence: a prayer to my God—an adieu to my liege, and I am as ready for eternity as the priest at the altar!"

"We shall meet again, De Biron," exclaimed Catherine, in a high-rapt tone, "where worth will have precedence, and where I shall only follow in your footsteps—but what thinks all the world about our *Villa Franca*?"

"Madame d'Usez says," replied the marshal, "that he was an eccentric comet, and rushed off in a tangent;—that some winter evening, perhaps, in our old age, we shall have him suddenly before us with an odd saying in his mouth. Chicot declares we ought to examine every willow-tree about Paris—that he died for love—but the jester is, I can assure your majesty, very much grieved, and only smiles through his tears. I have seen Bouillon this morning at his hotel; poor Brother Robert cannot reach his castle of Sedan without encountering the friends of the Duke of Guise, who are in arms in that quarter. He was very much attached to our young friend—laughter promotes digestion, it is said,—which may account for the duke's attachment."

At this point of conversation, they were interrupted by the unannounced entrance of Poulain, who in his hurry pushed aside the usher, and broke in upon the royal conference. Upon the marshal inquiring into the cause of his abruptness, the lieutenant solicited pardon of her majesty for omitting to inform her what he had promised De Nevaillès to keep secret; but a report having reached him, while pursuing his secret avocation in the city, that monseigneur had been assassinated by a priest, he felt desirous of disabusing her majesty of this suspicion—for no one should have more than his due, said the spy in his dry jesting humour—and he had run off to the palace to acquaint her with the truth. Hereupon he related what had passed between himself and monseigneur relative to the sword; De Biron and the queen exchanged looks upon hearing this communication.

"It only confirms my suspicions," exclaimed Catherine, after a pause; "it must have been a premeditated quarrel on the side of his antagonist. Where is the Chevalier d'Aumale? that secretary of state to our cousin Montpensier! He may know something of this business. Look after him, Poulain—look through his heart, and let me know what you have seen.

Let the other gentleman—the Baron de Nevailles, have a day's grace. The road to the Bastile is slow but sure. And be-think ye, lieutenant ! I have not yet despaired of finding mon-seigneur—or I should not forgive you for concealing his request from me. You may leave us."

The day passed over without any news of the favourite. Those who had hitherto looked upon the affair with a mirthful eye now became alarmed. It seemed a blow aimed less at Villa Franca personally, than at the whole court ; the first stroke of a new policy, by which its friends were to be cut off in detail ; nor was the violence of the supposed means any drawback to the current belief. The story of the quarrel also got into circulation ; and conjecture was rife in affixing the identity of his antagonist. It was known that many of the noblesse in the interest of the League were present—for the queen had not restricted her guests to the circle of her own friends—and Villa Franca was blamed for his laughable display of heresy, which it was now supposed had irritated the leaguers, and caused him to be marked out for the first attack.

Four days more passed away in the same uncertainty. Catherine was much grieved for the loss of her ablest counsellor. Chicot was inconsolable. Had not all felt a sympathy in his sorrow, his conduct would have elicited more mirth than ever resulted from his most joyous display of animal spirits. With all his grief—his art had become so habitual to him that he could not forget he was a fool—and the strange mixture of melancholy and humorous fancies in which he indulged, would have made Villa Franca laugh from his tomb.

The long-anticipated hunting-party came seasonably to Chicot's relief. The King of Navarre, escorted by the Duke d'Espernon and other gentlemen, and accompanied by the jester, left the Louvre for Fontainebleau on the day preceding the hunt.

Since the departure of De Nevailles, Emilie had ceased visiting Catherine at the usual hour. Though Margaret was angry with her *protégée* for the want of confidence displayed in allowing her to remain in ignorance of her new friendship, yet circumstances combined to render the discovery by no means unpleasant. The mystery was now solved in the reserve and taciturn obstinacy with which Navarre had evaded her proffered aid in escaping from the Louvre. It could only result, she had felt certain, from the predominance of another influence. But who within the walls of the palace possessed the power ? Certainly none of her own sex, for, with the ex-

ception of Emilie and herself, every lady in the Louvre was entirely in the interest of the queen; and as for Madame de Sauves, the captive monarch knew extremely well that she had formerly been Catherine's instrument for inveigling the Duke of Guise. And of the other sex, the same difficulty presented itself. De Biron was above suspicion; Grillon a mere commandant of troops, and knew nothing beyond his sphere; the nobles of the king's party, who humoured his devotional fantasies, could not be suspected; the officers of the palace were avowedly responsible for his safety; and lastly, Villa Franca, who presented the aspect of an intriguer, adventurer, and spy, knew too well whom his interest ought to serve, for the Queen of Navarre to have suspected his interference.

When curiosity, however, had brought her within hearing of Villa Franca's confession, all wonder was at an end; but her displeasure now took another turn; she felt chagrined that the merit of his escape would accrue to another, and that she would lose the anticipated hold on his gratitude. Here, however, fortune favoured her. The untoward arrival of the courier from Languedoc forced De Nevaillies to flee from recognition, and placed once more in her hands the conduct of the escape.

On the morning subsequent to the departure of Navarre for Fontainebleau, she was congratulating Emilie, that unless some unhappy accident arrived, they would soon have, in addition to the Baron de Nevaillies, a powerful friend in the king her husband.

"Rochelle is impregnable," said she; "Gascony will be his own—the Huguenots, in all quarters, will flock to his standard—and now that the Duke of Guise has divided power with my good parent—Navarre will certainly be equal to either of them. He shall teach the Queen of France to respect your claims and my wishes."

"Any fate but that which her majesty proposes to me!" said Emilie, slightly shuddering.

"Were I a son, instead of a daughter of France," rejoined the Queen of Navarre, "my power should at once lift you to a station equal to your right. But as it is, I am nothing! I married Navarre because I was obliged—and hated him, because that was in my power. I have quarrelled with my mother on your account,—so that I stand powerless! unsupported both by husband and family! Yet out of this destitution will I rear a superstructure of fortune which shall astonish my family, and compel them to my wishes. Navarre!

the hated, injured, enslaved King of Navarre, shall be my instrument! I have thrust him forth—the lion has not lost his claws—the southern breezes will fan his languid blood—the chivalry of the Bourbon will glow once more in his soul. His mountain warriors will come forth from their retreats—and then, Emilie, when he hovers like an eagle with outstretched wings, we'll seek shelter in his eyry! Till then, we must creep beneath the dark frowns of my mother."

"An humbler career would content me!" said Emilie, smiling at the vehemence of her protectress.

"Ah!" exclaimed the queen, "you would like to be the fair chatelaine of a romantic château, removed far away from the tumult of war! Yet this Villa Franca—the lord of your fancy—loves strife as a fish does water. He seems happy only in bringing danger on himself, or hurling it at others."

"I have been menaced with danger from my cradle!" replied Emilie; the smile which lit up her features while conversing with her protectress dying away as she reflected on the peril which surrounded her. "If I had been nurtured as freely as yourself, I might have been more aspiring. But humble as I am, I feel persuaded at times, that if I were once removed from the influence of enthrallment, I should turn round upon my oppressor like a provençal heroine of romance."

"You would disgrace your lineage if you could not," said Margaret; "but if my mother's soul were not like a piece of parchment, on which the affairs of Europe were written, washed out, and rewritten, your gentleness would have won upon her regard; and that was my object in bringing you to the Louvre," continued the Queen of Navarre; "and with what success, her cruel dictate has shown to you. She has absolved both you and myself from duty and allegiance. The advancement of the Catholic faith, and the preservation of her power, are every thing to her—and her family, nothing! Be it so. We must adopt a similar selfish policy."

"And yet it were worth another trial," said Emilie, "to see if we cannot inscribe some gentle thoughts on this piece of parchment—as you call the queen's mind."

"If we had the audacity of De Nevaillies," rejoined Margaret, laughing, "we should make her kneel to us."

The door opened suddenly, and Catherine stood before them with a letter in her hand, trembling with rage.

"What has happened?" said Margaret, in great alarm, suspecting that she was implicated in the cause of her mother's anger; "has Guise—"

"Guise!" cried Catherine, contemptuously,—*"he is a wax-doll. His eyes move, indeed, and so do his arms; but I pull the string! France is invaded! We are overrun with the scum of heretic Germany!"*

"Has the Elector—" asked Margaret.

"Curse the Elector!" exclaimed Catherine, interrupting her;—"it is your brother, François!"

"I thought he was at Tours," said the Queen of Navarre, gravely.

"Tours!" exclaimed the queen.

"I should like to see the Duke D'Alençon fight!" said Emilie, unable to restrain the ludicrous idea of the lord of tennis in the field of battle.

"It is very probable that you will," cried the Queen of France, in a calm tone. "You will soon journey that way."

Emilie and the Queen of Navarre exchanged looks, unnoticed by Catherine, who now reverted to her son François.

"Here," said she, contemptuously, "is a letter for a mother to listen to, and a sister to read! Let me hear the sweet strains once more."

Margaret took the letter, and read as follows:—

"To His Majesty, the King of Navarre.

"This will be conveyed to you by a safe hand—"

"So it shall," exclaimed Catherine, "when an attested copy has been taken of it."

Margaret continued:—

"I stripped my treasury at Tours—pawnd all my jewels—won a large sum at play—no one can equal me at tennis in the city of Tours—and arrived safe beyond the Rhenish provinces, where I found my soldiers strong as lions and as hungry. Clothing must be very dear in Germany, for it was uncommonly scarce in the camp. Even Prince Casimir, my general, a decent-looking fair-haired man, tall, thin, and stiff as a vineyard stake, had no great store to boast of;—he said it was no use to carry superfluous raiment with him, for his men stole it, and then killed each other in quarrelling about its division. When it was known that their chief had arrived in the camp—they came by thousands demanding their pay, and calling the good Queen Elizabeth very bad names for allowing them to starve so long. You know well that Casimir deceived the emperor by declaring that he was hired by the Queen of England to put down the set of savages who live in Ireland. R

saw some of the more civilized natives of that island when I was at London—they are brave, good-natured, ugly fellows, with well-made legs—”

“You remember Monsieur Ormond, Margaret,” cried the queen, who was now much calmer; “he was a good specimen of the nation which François speaks of.”

The Queen of Navarre continued:—

“When all were paid their arrears, they were willing to march; so we struck our tents and pushed on. It was, however, a very slow affair, as choice was made of the most unfrequented roads to elude the recognition of our forces. Nothing but trouble and vexation all day, and no amusement but drinking at night. I could no longer bear the deprivation of my favourite game, so I forced two regiments of lansquenets to become torch-bearers, and played after dark. Casimir will make a clever hitter in time. We entered Lorraine quite unexpectedly with a long train of empty wains, of which I did not know the use before. Here operations commenced. The main army marched on in tolerably good order; while certain regiments took it by turns to scour the country, and bring in whatever the frightened inhabitants left behind in their houses. By these means the wains were soon filled—clothing abounded in the camp, as well as plenty of fresh food; and in this palmy state we marched on till our vanguard encountered the Duke of Guise, at the crossing of the Moselle; we soon drove him from his position.”

“How valiant François has become,” said Catherine.

“Let me continue,” cried Margaret.

“He took refuge in a valley. When we came up to his lines it was near dusk, and too late to force his quarters, which were strengthened by palisades, and banks, and ditches. I know not what you would have done, my good cousin, in this predicament; Casimir threatened to overwhelm the duke in the morning with a force eight times the number of his little army. Then, thought I, our long-promised game will be for ever in the clouds; so I sent him an invitation to repair to our camp to have it played out; but in this matter he excused himself till the battle was first decided.”

“What a disappointment to monsieur!” said Emilie, smiling.

“We heard the sounds of gayety from their camp during the greater part of the night; but when morning came, to our great surprise, Guise and his men were not to be seen. They had all decamped, having drowned the noise of their march in affected mirth and riot. But they left the road free. When

our Germans, after a difficult march through the hilly country, reached the plains of France, all discipline was at an end. Like a river long pent up in a rocky channel, suddenly flowing over marshy ground, so they spread themselves, till the van and rear-guards were half a province asunder; and as for wings, each separate troop was a wing, and flew wherever it listed. Punishment was of no avail. Your majesty must have seen the German Ritters when under the command of Coligni—you found them brave enough;—I have looked closer into their character, and have discovered that they are excellent judges of bullion, silk, cloth, and viands, as well as of arms and military tactics. I told you their carriages were soon crammed; and so they were, as far as quantity was concerned; but the farther they got into France, the more fastidious they became. When in Lorraine, the question was, Can this be put into the wain? Now another question arises—Is it worth the carriage? If I had expected they would have helped themselves so extensively to the valuables of my brother's subjects, they should never have had my money. I look upon the disbursement as a sheer loss. But now to the business concerning your majesty. You will no doubt be glad to hear that I am in France with forty-thousand reformed soldiers—”

An exclamation from Catherine interrupted, for a moment, the perusal of her son's letter. “Read on,” said she, hastily.

“So am I very glad. I shall set the kingdom in order. Guise and the citizens have not yet dethroned my brother. I prevented that: he was assembling an army at Dijon for the purpose, when he heard of my entry. But unless your majesty speedily come to my assistance with the Huguenots, the disorder of the Germans will spoil every thing. They care for nothing but getting three or four dresses each for their wives and daughters. Turenne heard one of them swear, that when he came to Paris, he would have the Queen of France's stockings as a present for his Margaretha! What would my good mother say to that?”

Here Margaret and Emilie could not help joining in a laugh. But Catherine was intent on other matters. It is questionable whether she heard her son's question. She was leaning over the back of an antique chair, and seemed wrapt up in speculation.

“Shall I read on?” inquired the Queen of Navarre.

“Stay!” said Catherine; “forty thousand heretics! they might crush Guise! But who is to extinguish them? Heresy

is a light which may help one across a miry path, but it must be put out when its service is performed. Let me hear more!"

Margaret continued:—"Ere this, my good cousin, you ought to be in Gascony. But do not tarry in the Louvre. Risk life at once, and leap the boundary! If you cannot,—give orders to our good friend the Baron de Nevaillès to speed to the south—set your friends in motion—let them cross the Loire, and join me in the eastern provinces."

"Ah!" cried the Queen of France; "so you perceive this Baron de Nevaillès is a friend of François as well as of Navarre. The reason now appears why my worthy servant has not yet discovered him: he must have left Paris."

Emilie felt a tremor through her frame on hearing the name of the baron from the lips of the queen-mother. She durst not look at the Queen of Navarre.

Margaret was too agitated to make any remark; she continued to read:—"Has there been no hunting-party since I left the Louvre? No opportunity of seeing the outside of Paris? De Nevaillès is, I am afraid, a loiterer."

"My poor Villa Franca was wrong!" exclaimed the queen-mother; "he said the baron might have been a long time in Paris, but could not possibly have had access to 'my good cousin,' as François calls him, without his knowing it!"

Margaret could not help smiling at the delusion of her mother; she held up the letter before her face, and continued:—"The Huguenots would rise at your bidding, whether you be free or not; and for the sake of us both, send some able commanders, who can control these reckless Germans. The Duke of Guise hangs upon our rear, and has already cut off several small detachments through our utter carelessness. I have neither power nor military reputation to overawe the ruffians. If De Grammont or De Vivans were here, with a thousand of our countrymen to serve as provost-marshal's assistants in hanging up a few score of my brave army, great good would result to our cause. Hasten these matters, for I am sick to death.

"Your dear cousin,

"FRANÇOIS."

"My son François is a cleverer boy than I thought!" said the queen, after a long pause. "How could he have failed with the Queen of England? And my prisoner, Navarre, has deceived both Villa Franca and myself! This must be a source of great pleasure to you, Margaret!"

"Nay," cried the Queen of Navarre, "you know I have ever hated him. What measures shall you take to hinder—"

"What measures *shall* I take?" cried Catherine, laughing satirically, "you know me well enough to have inquired, what *have* I done? I have sent an order to Fontainebleau, which will put an untimely end to his amusements."

"It is strange," said Margaret, "that you did not hear of the German forces before you intercepted François's letter."

"Not so," replied Catherine: "Guise has cut off all our intelligence with the eastern provinces."

At this moment the Duchess D'Usez entered in a great hurry. Catherine inquired what news she brought.

"Merely a question to ask of your majesty," replied the duchess:—"how long has the courier been employed in looking out for the heretic baron?"

"Only since the masquerade," rejoined the queen-mother, smiling significantly, as if she were aware of the tendency of the question.

"And the King of Navarre knew of the hunt before that day?"

"Rest you content, D'Usez," replied Catherine, laughing; "the thought struck me the moment you had quitted,—and I despatched François the courier also to Fontainebleau. Navarre, indeed, expressed more anxiety than usual about the hunt."

"He may be too late," said Madame D'Usez.

"He has authority," rejoined the queen-mother, "to seize for his use every horse on the road. I have taken every precaution; and now rely upon Heaven not to allow this Huguenot or his master to escape. For my son François, he seems to have had punishment enough. He may be useful to us yet."

With these words Catherine left the saloon, to the great relief of her daughter and Emilie.

CHAPTER XV.

——— Had we no walking fire,
No saucer-eyed devil of these woods
That led us ?

THE GOBLINS.

FONTAINEBLEAU, the hunting seat of the French monarchs, stands in the centre of a large forest, skirted on the east by the Seine. Like all the French palaces, it is the work of successive masters, each having added to its dimensions after his own peculiar taste: the whole exhibits to the spectator an immense but irregular pile, impressing him with a sense of grandeur by its vastness and splendid decorations. Its gardens are of corresponding magnificence: to enumerate the fountains, statues, lakes, canals, grottoes, and other devices, would fill a folio volume; this is not within our scope; neither have we room for a description of the economy of the offices, or of the palace appertaining to the four-footed servants of his most Christian majesty.

The hotels of the noblesse who resorted to Fontainebleau, to join their sovereign in the diversion of the chase, and the inferior habitations of those who ministered to their comforts and luxuries, had gradually swelled a hamlet, of trifling extent, into a considerable town. The circumjacent forest is a noble domain, exhibiting a great variety of surface; its aspect diversified by rocks, hills, heaths, and other open tracks where the wood had been felled; the soil is sandy and sterile, fitted only for a covert for beasts of chase. No place was better suited for a royal retreat. The palace and gardens strike the beholder by their miraculous contrast to the surrounding sterility. Like the more modern Versailles, which, at the time we are writing of, was a forest without a palace, it exhibits the wonders which may be performed by wealth, and the love of splendour inherent in royalty.

The grand forester and his officers had received due notice of the royal visit. On the evening of the day preceding the sport, the chief, with his subordinate foresters, equerries, gentlemen, pages, prickers, and lackeys, assembled in front of the palace to receive Valois, who arrived, accompanied by the

King of Navarre, and a brilliant train of the noblesse. Air and exercise had done much to remove the melancholy which preyed upon the mind of the monarch; and the grand display of pageantry exhibited by the concourse of his own *cortège* with the officials of the palace—such a contrast to the poverty of the convent—reminded him of his birth and illustrious destiny. He felt himself a king. Nor was the interior of Fontainebleau less calculated to inspire noble thoughts. Every hall, every apartment, every wall, attested the magnificence of his ancestors. Fear could not enter such an abode; danger was laughed to scorn, amid the trumpeting which echoed from forest to forest, from hill to hill, when the majesty of France seated himself in the chair of his chivalric progenitors.

His cousin Navarre, who had a more difficult part to play, was the gayest of the gay. His *bonhomie*, wit, and cheerful disposition, while exercising a healthy influence on Valois, also tended to increase the familiarity between the courtiers and royalty. They formed, in truth, a joyous party, as pleasant as the evening which welcomed them to Fontainebleau.

The morning presented a still happier prospect than the evening. The trumpet awakened the guests to the pleasures which awaited them. The scene from the gardens was in the highest degree picturesque. The immense space in front of the palace was at an early hour animated with the presence of the foresters and prickers; Swiss guards and *gendarmes*; the noblesse and officers of the king; ladies who had accompanied their lords from the capital to witness the spectacle; the hounds coupled and under the charge of the lackeys; and all the necessary officers belonging to the hunting establishment of the king.

Valois and his suite at length issued from the palace. This was the signal for the huntsmen to lead on the hounds into the forest, preceded by the lackeys, who had the charge of the track-hounds, used only in starting the deer. Gradually the royal train disappeared; while the mounted troops, who had been selected for the occasion, kept up a constant patrol on the boundaries, far and wide.

This was a precaution always adopted when Navarre joined the hunt. And, in truth, it was a difficult and complicated task, as the forest was of many miles' breadth in every direction, intersected by hills, rocky ground, and other obstacles. The aim of the commandant was to keep his men as much as possible on the boundary, without appearing in sight of the royal party; and yet so near to each other, that every trooper could

hear the voice of his comrade, and, if possible, hold him in view, that no one might pass through the interval unseen. Besides this continued line of military, there were troops who patrolled the entire boundary.

The royal party followed, at a short distance, the foresters and huntsmen. The only unpleasant feeling which remained with Valois, arose from the apparent despondency of his jester. And as it had been recommended by the queen-mother that his majesty should not be informed of the alarming disappearance of Villa Franca, lest he himself might anticipate violence, he could not account for the silence of Chicot.

"Are you tongue-tied, Chicot?" said the monarch, disappointed of his usual amusement, which custom had rendered more necessary than playthings to a child:—"Are you afraid that Trista Verita will play you an ill turn to-day? Has any foolish astrologer foretold that you will break your neck?"

This speech was good enough, coming from the mouth of a king, to warrant a laugh, in which the royal speaker joined. Chicot shook his head awfully. The party laughed the more.

"Noise! noise! nothing but noise!" muttered the jester; "I wish the mare had wings."

"You would be eagle-hunting," said Valois.

"I have lost my eagle," said the jester, "and all the crows flap their wings."

"Do not lose your memory!" said Villeroi, sharply.

The jester turned aside his head, and distending his jaws, emitted such a powerful and abrupt cackling, as one might suppose a demon would give vent to, in mockery of the human race, that the bridle-arm of the secretary shook nervelessly. The noise was echoed by the surrounding woods.

"Let me hear the echo to such a note," cried Valois, rising in his stirrups; "foresters! your horns."

"May it please your majesty! No!" said the grand forester; "the track-hound is on the scent. Another such cry," continued the officer, looking at Chicot, "and our game will be lanced before all the dogs are uncoupled."

"You are right, monseigneur!" said the corrected monarch.

The grand forester had spoken the truth. The track-hound, which is held by a string lest it should spring upon the animal, had entered a thicket. The foresters were well pleased, as the hoof-marks which they had tracked promised a full-sized stag. Presently a rustling and crash of boughs were heard; the hound gave tongue; a stag of the noblest

proportions rushed from the thicket. The foresters, well drilled in the minstrelsy of the chase, sounded *la première lanée*; the dogs were uncoupled, and immediately gave chase, excited by the cheering of the huntsmen, and the well-known notes of the horn. The mounted prickers urged on the hounds, and were followed by the king and his suite.

The stag,—pronounced by the grand forester the finest he had seen in Fontainebleau—though Villeroi, whose affectation of the chase increased with his years, said it was but a six-tipt antler, an opinion which drew forth a chorus of laughter—in the pride of its strength and speed kept an even course along the open chase, without turning into the brakes on either side. This was mere holyday work; it allowed Navarre to utter a few sentences in praise of the hounds, called familiarly by the huntsmen the Registrars, and named after an old secretary, the Villeroi of a former reign. They had supplanted, in the estimation of the late Charles the Ninth, brother of Valois and a famous hunter, the black dogs called after St. Hubert, and preserved from age to age, from the disappearance or death of the saint, by the monks of St. Hubert in the forest of Ardennes. These were black, with marks of fire about the eyes; the chosen hounds of the phantom huntsman; but they were unworthy of his patronage, for their pace was not of the quickest—and they were, besides, timid and irresolute when a fresh stag bounded across their track.

The Registrars were now the favourites; white coated—of the swiftest foot—more cunning than the black dogs of the saint, they never gave tongue but when on the scent. If the stag tried to elude them by mixing with the herd—then it was that they proved themselves in the eyes of the foresters.

The full-antlered animal soon found out their power, and unwilling to display his generosity any longer, struck out a path for himself across the forest, thickly covered with underwood. It was now that the sport began. Several horsemen were dismounted; others became entangled in the underwood; but Valois, Navarre, Villeroi, and many more, followed the hounds, and kept an equal pace with the huntsmen.

The manœuvring of the stag fully justified the grand forester's opinion of his age, had not the spread and numbers of his antlers confirmed it. The aspect of the country favoured his noble exertions. Having reached a spot where his course was impeded by the projecting underwood, he took a stone-quarry—an awkward leap, though the descent was not much—and bounding over the scattered blocks of stone, he regained

the opposite bank, and was soon out of sight ; the hounds close upon him. The foresters, who knew the country, preferred making a detour to the left to falling among the broken stone. They were followed by Valois and Navarre, and others of less note ; but Villeroi, whose ambition was to shine equally in the field and the cabinet, having been outstripped by Navarre and his majesty, who rode the ground with skill, thought to take the lead by bold riding. Instead therefore of following the royal hunters, when he arrived at the underwood, he dashed through an opening, at a short distance to the right of the stag's leap, hoping to regain the first view of the hounds, whose cry was in that direction.

The remainder of the party putting confidence in the old Nimrod, followed, as they severally arrived. The first was a young noble from Languedoc. Stooping his head to avoid contact with the branches above, he found himself and steed the next moment in a quagmire. The rapid descent unhorsed him, and he fell alongside of the old secretary. More of the party were coming to the slough-leap. Wishing to caution them off the spot, he was about to raise an alarm, when Villeroi laying hold of his doublet near the neck, brought his head close to the mire, crying—

“ Silence, monseigneur, let us all wear the same livery.”

One after another they came rushing down, to the great satisfaction of the secretary, although he and his unwilling friend received some severe bruises in the *mêlée*.

Though the royal party escaped the mire, they were not fortunate enough to recover view of the hounds. The quarry was cut into the side of a hill, and they were forced to make its circuit ; yet the stag had taken the contrary direction. Till they had doubled the eminence, every second carried them farther from the chase. In this dilemma, the second officer of the hunt, with the prickers and lackeys, pushed on at a fearless rate to recover a view of the pack.

Valois and his friends rode on, guided by the distant cry of the hounds. But this soon ceased.

“ The Registrars are at fault,” cried the grand forester ;— “ they have lost the track, and with it their tongue. They are too honest for boasters.”

“ We should have struck away to the right,” said Valois, reining up.

“ That would have been much worse,” replied the forester ;— “ your majesty's brother, of happy memory, used to call

that hollow the infernal river. The spring which rises near the quarry runs over a clay slough."

"Just the leap for Monseigneur Villeroi," exclaimed Chicot, in a solemn tone:—"I saw him turn that way."

"And a host with him for a thousand crowns!" cried Navarre, suddenly starting from a fit of reverie.

The party were now stationary. The notes of a horn were heard at a distance: it sounded a challenge.

"How is this?" exclaimed Valois, "I hear the *l'appel* to the left. What a sweep the prickers have made!"

"I heard that horn several times during the run—always in advance," said the forester, gloomily; "it is not sounded by my foresters. They cannot have ridden from north to west in so short a time."

"The minstrel, like ourselves, is at fault," said Navarre,— "let us reply to his challenge!"

The king's forester replied in the same key. It was answered by a flourish, indicating that the track of the stag was recovered.

"There!" cried Valois, "let us renew the chase! No one would dare trifle with us in our own domain! Your prick-ers have done wonders. St. Hubert's portion shall be doubled for this day's sport!"

Navarre seemed restless at the delay; he waved his hand for the grand forester to lead in the direction of the horn. The forester prepared to obey; but shook his head, and said in a mysterious tone—

"He who blows yonder horn cares not for St. Hubert's portion. By the blessed virgin, I could have sworn my prick-ers were northward still! But forward, my lieges! I care not for the meeting! Robert! tell him we follow!"

The forester sounded in obedience to his chief. The leader of the hunt, who had dismounted during the parley, now remounted his steed, to lead what he could not help believing would be a fearful chase; but while springing forward through an avenue in the direction of the distant hunt, another horn was heard in the north. He suddenly checked his horse; the animal reared at the convulsive motion of the rider, who, however, threw himself off with ease, and approaching the king, exclaimed, with a look of fear—"I spoke the truth! It was he!"

But Valois was now as terrified as his chief forester. The reins fell from his hands; the perspiration rolled from his forehead; and he sat like one who had seen a fearful vision. Mean-

while the sounds of the woodland horn came ringing from the north in notes which plainly told the party that the minstrel and those with him were at fault. Navarre looked pale, but it was the paleness of rage rather than fear. Chicot sat on his *Trista Verita* at a few paces from his master, beneath the spreading branches of an oak, and looking upon the bewildered party like a solemn owl surveying the follies of mankind from his nook.

"The north be the true men!" said several of the foresters.

"That western cry—" said the grand forester.

"I know it!" said the king:—"my brother Charles was once in the same distress. One of the horns must belong to the Phantom! But who shall say which? Let us retire to the palace!"

"Never! as I am a Bourbon!" shouted the King of Navarre; "Let us cast away fear!"

"No ill-luck ever followed a Bourbon's meeting with the spirit," said Valois, with dignity; "but it never boded good to a Valois!"

"Let us go northward!" said D'Espernon and several gentlemen.

The horn from the north rang again, indicating a default: it was followed by the dubious notes from the west, much fainter, as though the party had continued the chase in that quarter. Navarre held his breath, but his heart was beating with violence against his side.

"Let us go northward," said the chief forester; "I hear the cries of my pricklers—the horn comes from the old cross of the Sisters of Charity—It is beyond yonder wood!"—

"Never!" cried Valois, in alarm; "my brother told me on his death-bed—he once lost your company, monseigneur, and reached that old cross, and saw—but I must not reveal what he told me. He knew from that hour he had not many months to live. Any where but near the cross!"

"Where did you order the relay to be stationed, monseigneur?" asked D'Espernon.

"Near the chapel of the Virgin," replied the chief.

"Then the matter is explained," said D'Espernon, laughing; "some of our dismounted friends, whom we lost at the first rush into the woody country, have started a fresh hunt. They are now in full cry, and will laugh at our disappointment. What thinks my liege?"

"That I will not go near the cross, D'Espernon!" replied the king, much relieved at this idea of his favourite; "let us

ride after our friends. Chicot says that Villeroi attempted to cross near the quarry. If he were foiled there, he may have rode by the hill, and galloped after the distant chase in the west."

The chief of the hunt shook his head; but seeing that the king was resolute not to ride northward since his unlucky mention of the cross—he prepared to obey.

"I hope Villeroi is fixed in the mud heels uppermost," said Navarre to himself; "I dared not have said what I did had he been present. He looked at me this morning as though he would read my heart through my doublet. He would make a better jailer than De Biron! But, hurrah! for the old cross!"

The forester took the lead, followed by the royal party. But his heart misgave him every acre he rode over, as the notes from the north still rang in his ear.

Though the King of Navarre appeared as free as any of the party, yet in reality every one had an eye upon him, and watched his movements. This he was sensitively aware of; and it took away the ease and grace which was ordinarily attached to his princely demeanour. Yet his cheerfulness remained, though it appeared forced and constrained, more like the efforts of the jester.

They still continued to ride at a rapid pace in the western direction, at intervals challenging their supposed friends, whose reply at length indicated a much closer approximation. The sounds grew nearer and nearer.

"The sport has fortunately taken this way," said D'Espernon, "or our tired horses would never have brought us within view till after the death."

They came all at once upon a close wood of young trees and underwood. Hounds were furiously barking on the opposite side.

"Blow the *Pappel!*" cried Navarre.

Robert, the forester, obeyed; it was answered by a flourish, announcing the death of the stag.

The grand forester refused to enter the wood; he declared that the cries he heard were not the music of his majesty's dogs—it was more like St. Hubert's than the piping of the Registrars.

"St. Hubert's!" exclaimed Valois, in alarm.

"Let not your majesty be exposed to this dread!" said Navarre, in a kindly tone; "who will accompany me, and resolve the mystery?"

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It would have been contrary to the queen's injunctions to have allowed Navarre to pass alone ; several volunteered to go with him. Without waiting for other answer, the captive dashed into the thicket. The passage appeared impracticable ; and D'Espernon, who followed, requested him to give up the attempt.

"No !" cried Navarre, "the fears of Valois shall be quieted, or he will fall sick."

The branches of the young trees were the chief impediments to their passage ; and, in order to obviate the difficulty, Navarre bowed his head below the horse's neck, and placing his hand before his eyes as a protection, he clapped spurs to his steed, which sprang forward like a frightened deer. D'Espernon heard the repeated crashing and rustling of the boughs ; he wondered at the rashness and folly of his leader ; but it was not till the noise of the horse's passage was growing fainter, that any other idea entered his mind.

"It behooves us to be present at this meeting," said D'Espernon, addressing several who were following in his track. "Forward ! gentlemen."

"I have lost my cap," said one of the suite.

"And I am dizzy with a blow on the forehead : no one would have suspected a black club of a branch behind those soft green leaves !" cried another.

"The fortune of war ! Stoop low, my friends," said D'Espernon, as he put in practice the expedient of Navarre, though afraid to dash on at the heedless rate of the monarch.

Some time elapsed before he emerged from the thicket. He arrived just in time to catch a glimpse of several horsemen turning round a wood at the end of the long glade. He shouted, but they were not within hearing ; another moment, they were out of sight. There remained neither stag, huntsmen, nor hounds ! Navarre's horse, and two others, both saddled and caparisoned for hunting, alone were visible, quietly grazing, and seemingly very much satisfied to rest after their long and fatiguing chase.

"By St. Michael !" cried D'Espernon, "the Bourbon has slipped us awhile. The Phantom has carried him off ; and if not below ground, we shall hear of him in the south among his Huguenot friends. Raise the alarm, monsieur, while this gentleman and myself give chase. Tell his majesty we will drive the illustrious antler upon the Swiss prickers !"

But unfortunately for D'Espernon and his friend, their horses were much jaded ; and from the speed they had witnessed in

the retreating horsemen, they were soon convinced that their only chance was in the vigilance of the troopers on the verge of the forest. It was not without a thrill of anxiety for the result that D'Espéron heard several arquebuse discharges. It was evident there was a conflict with the patrolling guard.

While agitated with reflections on the possible fate of the captive monarch, who might probably fall beneath the fire of the guard, the duke heard a trampling in his rear; and on turning round he beheld Villeroi, Grillon, and a score of well-mounted gendarmerie. It was impossible to look at the secretary without laughing at his singular costume of green, dappled so thickly from head to foot with yellow mud that the ground colour was scarcely visible.

"What news, Monseigneur Villeroi?" said the duke.

"Colonel Grillon has arrived with a despatch from Paris, telling us that the King of Navarre will try to elude our troops to-day, and that it is very likely the Huguenot Baron de Ne-vailles will be found here aiding his escape."

"He has gone already," said D'Espéron.

"Gone! Escaped!" shrieked the secretary;—"Well, I dreamed of it last night. Where is his majesty?"

"The other side yonder wood, waiting the return of myself and the King of Navarre, who slipped away from us at the hazard of every limb and feature!" replied the duke.

A short consultation ensued. As the horses of the gendarmerie were as fatigued as those of D'Espéron and his friend, pursuit was of no avail. A messenger was sent back to the king, while Villeroi and his friends pushed forward to learn the cause of the firing. They met a company of the Swiss guard, which, according to the arrangement of the commandant, had been ordered to patrol the forest, while the cavalry kept guard on the boundaries. Upon being challenged, the officer in command called out several of his men, who had been engaged in the rencounter. From their replies was gathered the following curious and mysterious narrative.

While reposing on the ground, they had been disturbed by the rapid advance of several horsemen. They instantly sprang to arms—clapped the match to their arquebuses—and stood on their guard. In a moment afterward, there rode by a strange-looking being, mounted on a black horse. His apparel was of the same colour as his steed; his face of a red earthy hue, with large dark eyebrows. By his side ran a couple of hounds, matching the steed in their dusky tint. The corporal and his two comrades were so struck with terror, that they

were unable to challenge the devil, as they called him. Immediately behind this monster came another—in similar costume, save his horse, which was of a chestnut colour—and carrying in his hand a hunting horn. When this second devil beheld the three Swiss, he quite withered their hearts with a horrible grimace, and leaning over his steed, without checking its pace, blew a hellish blast, which completed their dismay. Their arquebuses shook upon the rests.

Next came a gentleman in the gay hunting apparel of the court. He was mounted on a white horse, and as he rode past the Swiss, averted his head.

Whether the sign of human fear dispelled the alarm of the corporal, he could not say, but it certainly reassured him ; for the gentleman had not ridden many paces ere the Swiss cried out—

“By the Virgin ! that was the King of Navarre and no fiend. Obey orders—take a steady aim at the white horse—and let the devils go home free.”

All three let fall their match-cord at the same moment ; the white horse leaped forward and fell. The two devils instantly checked their horses ; and before the Swiss durst advance, the first fiend seizing Navarre under the arm-pits, drew him across the neck of his black steed, and galloped off ; while the second fiend, after giving vent to a horrid laugh, followed his evil fellow.

It was not till they were out of sight that the guards marched up to the dying horse. The officer of the company hearing the report of the arquebuses came at once to the spot, and found the Swiss around the prostrate animal. Upon hearing their story, he instantly sent messengers to the detachments of cavalry, whom he believed to be now in pursuit of the fugitive.

Such was the wonderful story narrated to Villeroi and his party ; and the dead horse certainly confirmed a portion of it. Fresh messengers were instantly despatched to Valois to acquaint him with the circumstances. He was still in the midst of his friends, on the spot where Navarre had first entered the wood.

To say the truth, he would much rather that Navarre should have escaped than he himself receive a visit from the phantom huntsman ; and amid all the consternation which the flight had created, he felt easier than for many a day previous. And besides, though he was forced, or suffered himself to be guided by his mother, in the affairs of state, he did not see the ne-

cessity of keeping captive his old friend and companion, who he thought would make a better ally than enemy. Though a strict Catholic, and, as we have shown, zealous in his faith, his policy with regard to religion was of too abstract and visionary a nature to urge him to the strong and violent measures in which the queen-mother had indulged. He secretly determined to return to Grandmontains, and leave his friends to bear the brunt of Catherine's anger.

Chicot was penetrating enough to observe the indifference of his master, and as the queen was not present, he ventured to turn the affair into ridicule. Villeroi and D'Espernon returned to the royal party; the secretary presented a woful appearance of mud, fatigue, and anxiety.

"If her majesty had taken my advice," cried the old courtier, "the King of Navarre would now be safe in the Bastile!"

"He is in much safer hands," cried Chicot; "we ought in charity to have masses said to liberate him from his present warm prison."

"Silence, fool," cried the angry secretary.

"I obey," replied Chicot; and then turning his back on Villeroi, he whispered to the Duke D'Espernon, "Monseigneur the secretary has received a new coat from the Fontainebleau herald—a *field vert*, with *bezants*, or *semée*—indicating at once his love of dirt and money."

This was overheard by the king, who cast a sly look at his jester, without being perceived by the secretary.

Meanwhile Villeroi was chafing himself with the unsatisfactory reports brought from the commandant, whose cavalry had not yet secured the fugitive. But every one declared it was impossible he could eventually escape.

"The Registrars are close by, as fresh as when first uncoupled," said the grand forester, who cared little about Villeroi's affairs; "shall we put on the track-hound?"

"Hang the track-hound!" exclaimed the furious secretary, forgetful of the royal presence, and whose eye, ear, and mind were intent only on one object.

"Better drown him!" said Chicot, amid the laughter of the party.

"Her majesty will drown and hang us all!" rejoined Villeroi, "if we do not bring back the King of Navarre and those black impostors."

"Black impostors!" muttered the grand forester to himself; "if you had lived as long in the forest as I have, you would learn to fear them."

CHAPTER XVI.

Thus far into the bowels of the land
Have we marched on.—

SHAKESPEARE.

SINCE the Duke D'Alençon had written the epistle to Navarre, which had so inopportunately fallen into the hands of Catherine in its transit, the condition of the German army had not at all improved ; but, on the contrary, its characteristic love of plunder and insubordination daily increased. D'Alençon having no skill in military affairs, could only remonstrate on these disorders ; Casimir was brave and talented, but his talents were not of a character to overawe licentious and impoverished troops in the midst of a fertile country. The Duke of Guise, taking advantage of their careless method of encampment, had twice attacked them at night with considerable advantage ; but even these rough lessons were insufficient to teach better order ; they perceived that the leaguer was afraid of their numbers by day, and therefore despised him altogether as an enemy.

IN this dilemma, D'Alençon took counsel with his confidant, the Viscount de Turenne, colonel of the duke's own regiment of Ritters. Turenne proposed, and his advice met the approval of his illustrious friend, that he should push forward with his regiment into Gascony to make a *point d'appui* for the Huguenots, which would soon bring together all the old chiefs of that sect, who were as soon as possible to march to the aid of the Germans, and force them into discipline and order.

Turenne, although a man of many words, singularly eloquent, was also a man of action, and put his plans into execution the very morning subsequent to his conference. Under pretence of making a reconnoissance, he pushed forward his Ritters, a thousand strong, for a day and night, with scarcely any rest ; and it was not till he felt himself quite assured of being beyond recall, that he dropped into the ordinary rate of march.

His men, though somewhat better clothed than the remain-

der of the army, still exhibited but a scanty appointment in the necessary furniture of war. They were armed with swords and match-lock pistols; and were protected, or ought to have been, by a morion, cuirass, and tassets, to cover the thighs. It happens unavoidably in warfare, that during a long campaign, the original equipment of a regiment of cavalry is sadly deranged; the primal state of man is, in many instances, scarcely hidden beneath the superteguments of art—shoes stand in place of boots, and the light vain cap supersedes the proud frowning helmet.

But with the Viscount de Turenne's regiment of Ritters, as well as with the other Germans, the case was very different. The original design of equipment had been only ideal; and it was left to the fortune of the campaign to complete the realization. One man was without a cloak; another deficient in iron to protect his head, of metal hard enough otherwise; a third harboured an inward envy of his comrade, instead of an outward pair of boots; and so on.

We do not know but that with men like these Germans, it was a wise economy; at least, necessity is the mother of military virtue, for when they came in sight of the enemy, there was a double motive for fighting—besides the glory of the action, the man whose brow was unadorned with a helmet, felt his fingers itch to cut down a more—or, as it often happened, less—fortunate trooper of the enemy.

Such being the *morale* of the regiment, it was sure to improve in outward appearance as long as affairs were not absolutely desperate. The end of the campaign, under ordinary circumstances, completed the wardrobe and arms, as originally designed; and if the war ceased at that period, each man hung up in his hall or hut an entire equipment, to stimulate the ambition of his children in the same honourable and profitable pursuit.

In truth, these German Ritters were a bold, reckless set. Their only virtue was their religion—they swore by Martin Luther instead of the pope and the saints. They proved both a blessing and a curse to France and to Europe. Their march was attended with plunder, and their course might be tracked by the desolation it left behind. Yet the Constable Montmorency, the Admiral Coligni, the Prince of Condé, and lastly, Henry of Navarre, our good friend and companion—all mighty warriors, who were instrumental in furthering the religious reformation of France, and consequently of Europe, derived

in various campaigns much assistance from this scum of Protestant Germany—the rapacious Ritters. And as we are removed by two or three centuries from the distresses occasioned by the rapine—yet are still in the enjoyment of the good which they were agents in accomplishing—we are induced by charity to overlook their bad qualities, and turn our attention principally upon their bravery and rough military freedom.

Turenne's regiment was composed of some few Saxons and Hessians ; the others principally from the Suabian circle, and principalities contiguous to the Rhine. He had reduced them so far into discipline that they refrained from plunder and disorder except on unavoidable occasions, which, however, were held to be pretty frequent.

On the afternoon of the second day's march, the two scouts in advance beheld at a distance a solitary horseman, whose appearance promised a supply of clothes and money. The elder of the Germans was an old veteran who had plundered in France in several successive invasions, his name, Ezzelin ; and he gloried in a full equipment, the result of former victories—his present aim, therefore, was money. The other scout answered to the name of Schwartz. He was a tall lathy fellow, with a complexion belying his name, and features indicative of larceny and cunning, with a touch of dry humour, which no low-bred rascal should be without, as it cheers him under misfortune. The villain of a higher stamp has his turn best served by melancholy ; it creates sympathy among his associates ; whereas the companions of a man in the class of our tall Schwartz, have generally little sympathy to spare.

"Yonder looks a fine bird," said Schwartz ;—"he is strong on the wing, and has a stomach full of courage, or he would not drop so leisurely into our net !"

"I hope he is a Catholic," cried Ezzelin, who was scrupulous in his dealings ;—"the colonel has forbidden us to touch our brethren in faith."

"By the Virgins of Kölin," replied Schwartz, "there is no difficulty in that. If we say we are Catholics, he will call himself one of our faith, so I shall have his cloak either way."

"And if he be a good Protestant," rejoined Ezzelin, "he will never carry idolatrous money with him—these Catholics have the harlot's images in their purses, which is a hundred times worse than building up crosses in the public roads."

"Don't say a word against those fine tall logs," retorted the other;—"you know we should have been without a fire last night—it was the best seasoned timber I ever set light to!"

During this colloquy, the two Germans kept an attentive watch upon the pace of the traveller, who was now within call. He was about to pass them quietly, though apparently much delighted to recognise their foreign costume, when Ezzelin, who spoke French with more facility than his comrade, threw himself in the way, and demanded the particulars of his journey, his name, religion, and rank. No commissary of police could have put the questions with more coolness. The traveller, equally calm, replied that he was sculptor to the Queen of France.

"What post is that—what is your employment?" said Ezzelin.

"The most devout and pious of any," replied the traveller; "I create, out of the rude block of marble, the forms of the most illustrious saints and apostles, to adorn our churches."

The two Ritters relaxed their faces into a look of pious horror at this most damnable employment of image-making. Though the fingers of Ezzelin were imaginatively feeling the idolatrous surfaces of the traveller's coin, and the shoulders of the other Ritter seemed already warmed by their anticipated covering, yet for form sake, they resolved to ask another question or two.

"Where are you now journeying to?" said the spokesman.

"To Joinville, to chisel the monumental statue of a rich citizen," replied the artist, now beginning to look at his interrogator with suspicion.

"Are not you an imp of Rome and of the devil," said Ezzelin, approaching a little closer, "not to be conscience-struck with your unholy work? By the soul of Luther! here is a man whose idolatry shames the earth!"

"Shames the earth, trooper!" cried the artist; "every thing looks better than nature when it comes from my hands. If I had to chisel your effigies, instead of that face, knotted like the trunk of an old oak, I should make you as smooth as a cherub; if the design were for a tomb, I should put wings to your cheeks instead of those mares' tails. Your head would look as if it were flying—"

"Shaking like a man with St. Anthony's fire, I suppose you would say," said the trooper, grinning: "but enough.—In the name of our holy Luther, render up your idolatrous wages from—"

"Ay! and the cloak—the cloak of popery!" added Schwartz, who was well able to express his wants.

"Nay, friends, do not draw! I shall make no resistance to demands so just and natural," said the traveller, reining back—"but one word."

"Quick, then! before our detachment comes up," cried Ezzelin; "if they see you, you will have neither doublet nor hose to spare."

"What, so close!" shouted the traveller, who instantly clapped spurs to his horse's sides, and reined in at the same moment. The whole force of the lofty capriole fell obliquely upon the elder Ritter; horse and rider were thrown together to the ground, and the artist galloped on till stopped by the regiment.

He was too wise to trifle any longer, but immediately demanded to speak with the colonel. Turenne and the stranger saluted each other most cordially. They were old acquaintances.

"We have been looking a long time for the fruits of your exertions, Baron de Nevaillès," exclaimed the viscount; "and your appearance here is a token of success. Where is our illustrious chief?"

"Ay, where?" said the baron, with a mysterious look. There are two stories told of his majesty: one, that the devil, or the wild huntsman of Fontainebleau, carried him away, no one knows where—and the other is a mere whisper among those who discountenance superstition—that he was seen hurrying off to the south. I must leave it to the judgment of the Viscount de Turenne to choose his faith."

"Are you now trifling or in earnest?" cried Turenne, "for I never know which."

De Nevaillès repeated, he must judge for himself—he could only report what he had heard. Thereupon he related to the viscount the extraordinary hunt and its abrupt termination—the after-drama of the Swiss, with their fears and strange vision—the desperate search made by Villeroi and the troops—their want of success—and lastly, the whisper afloat, that Navarre had not been carried underground, but was still on the surface of the earth, with all the responsibility of a human agent.

From the manner in which this tale was related, Turenne more than suspected that the baron knew more about the matter than the rest of the world. But, however, such was De Nevaillès' humour, that his friend forbore questioning him further till a more convenient opportunity.

The baron was on his route to join D'Alençon, but when he heard of his situation, and also of the viscount's attempt to cross the kingdom, he resolved to accompany the latter, as his single arm could be of no service to the prince in his difficulties.

"You shall have the command of a troop," said the colonel; "there is one vacant, under the command of the lieutenant; but as you know the country, Freiberg must give way."

"I shall not be a bar to his honours long," replied the baron, "for I have sent word by my rogue Antoine for my friends at De Nevaillies to join the standard of Navarre, wherever it may be planted!"

"Ah!" cried Turenne, "I have no doubt the wild huntsman will give him up at their bidding!"

The colonel then ordered the regiment to halt. He addressed the men in their native tongue, telling them that the Baron de Nevaillies, one of the twelve ancient barons of the principality of Bearn, annexed to the kingdom of Navarre, was about to take the command of the first troop—that he knew all the roads and passes as well as they knew their own homes—that he was a sincere Huguenot, and a bosom friend of his sovereign—and that, in their present difficult enterprise of crossing provinces in the possession of the enemy, the arrival of the baron was the luckiest event which could have befallen them.

This speech, and its object—the baron, were both received with a grateful uproar of German oaths and epithets, mixed with a considerable quantity of barbarous French. De Nevaillies was then formally installed into command.

"To which troop do the scouts belong?" asked the baron in a low key.

"To your own," replied Turenne;—"they are two of the best troopers in the regiment."

"Umph! *ex pede Herculem*!" exclaimed the baron; "I must order them to be put under arrest!"

Turenne had suspected something of the kind from the rapid pace at which the baron rode up; but as the latter had not alluded to it, the colonel was not bound to anticipate the license of his men. He now inquired into the affair, which afforded them both some amusement. A trooper was sent forward to inquire into the condition of Ezzelin, and soon returned with the intelligence that the old man was without hurt, and quietly riding by the side of his comrade.

"Take no notice of the affront," said the colonel, "and be

sure you disabuse them of the notion they have respecting your religion, or your cloak will be still in jeopardy."

De Nevalles promised to attend to his advice, and the march was resumed. The baron could not help smiling at the idea of his new station and retrograde movements. One day travelling under suspicious circumstances ; the next a favourite with the Queen of France, and privy to the secrets of her policy ; again a wanderer, and now, to complete the climax, captain of a troop of free German Ritters. It was most amusing, and pleased his fancy highly ; but there came, unbidden, a pang of regret and melancholy to disturb his happy thoughts. He had left Emilie without one word or adieu ;—nay, more, without the possibility of seeing her again ; for the Louvre was now closed to him for ever. There was now but one door in Paris, that of the dreaded fortress, which would open at his approach ; it had already yawned upon him. He had seen his own passport to enter the Bastille, and his present service was the readiest countersign to Villeroi's order. Again ; the name and rank of his fair mistress ! What was she ? Why the mystery which even love could not solve ? Why Catherine's anger and distrust, yet familiarity withal ; and Margaret's ever-ready kindness and protection towards this fair creature ?

Was she an orphan of wealth—deprived of her treasure by the queen ?—Impossible. Catherine was not avaricious, but, on the contrary, generous, affable, and kind, when her intricate and subtle policy allowed of these virtues. Emilie *must* stand in the way of the queen's policy, thought our captain of Ritters ; a spectre before the horses which drag on the chariot of state !—and the baron laughed at his addition to her majesty's favourite metaphor. Yet the mirth was not of long duration. It only increased his melancholy. He blamed the delicacy of feeling which had restrained his curiosity from discovering the rank and station of her on whom his affections were bestowed. He was in love with one without a name ; and, probably, parted from her for ever. Here was a dilemma for a diplomatist ! If he had been only a soldier, there might have been an excuse for his folly. But for one who had meddled with the great European family of kingdoms and states—like all families, quarrelling among themselves !—Pshaw ! It was too bad !

"It is ever thus," murmured he, "that I go beyond my natural sphere ? I walk round about the nets which the members of society spread for each other ; I admire their beauty and texture, or their weakness and deficiencies ; I throw them

playfully over my own body, and am caught, a gratuitous prey to the owner !”

Intuitively, as it were, for the baron's eyes were cast downward during his reflections, he looked up, and found that he was watched attentively by one deserving of consideration. The gazer was a young man, much younger than any of the troop. By his dress and station, he appeared to be an officer of the Ritters. He must be the lieutenant whom I have displaced, thought De Neailles, for his looks are full of malice ! Without appearing to notice the circumstance, the baron fell back, and joined the colonel, determined to inquire into the character of his subaltern, who might prove a dangerous enemy, if appearances ever warranted evil opinions.

From Turenne's account, it appeared that young Freiberg was the son of the baron of that name. He had run away from the college at Wittenburg to join the Ritters, without the knowledge or sanction of his father, and was a most determined agent in every species of daring and plunder in which the Germans indulged. Careless of the respect due to his birth, he seemed anxious to assimilate his habits as closely as possible to the freebooting troopers he commanded. Courage he had enough of for the whole regiment ; but that was his only good quality, and far outbalanced, by the excesses into which he led his men, and the disorder which his bad example generated. He joined D'Alençon's army without notion of, or excited either by religion, love of glory, or want of the means of living. It was purely the freak of an ill disposed student. The discipline of the men was nothing—the character of the regiment was nothing—the success of the enterprize itself was nothing to him. He gratified his passions, and these satisfied, terminated his hopes and fears.

Nature, either in despair, or more probably in disgust, had done nothing to improve his person into a semblance of better-tempered humanity. It was a counterpart of his mind—but just escaping the charge of deformity—and the features of his face nowise excelling either the mental or physical stature of the owner. They were disagreeable and repulsive rather than absolutely hideous—man, body and soul, are one till death, an inscrutable union, closer than cause and effect, and mutually causative and reflective ; or, we might have said, with some appearance of truth, that a gentler soul would have wrought the outward workmanship of nature to an aspect more attractive.

Such was the man, or rather boy, who glared upon De Ne-
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vailles,—an omen of evil promise. The baron returned to his post at the van of the regiment. He had seen too much of the world to exult in the obvious disappointment of the lieutenant ; and he felt himself too much in the power of both subaltern and troopers, to carry on a rivalry with their countryman. He was, besides, willing to make allowance for one who had certainly been in command of the troop—and his present abatement of rank would not have been pleasing even to the most amiable mind.

The baron, therefore, tried to conciliate his fellow-officer, but he found him a more difficult personage than the Queen of France. Indeed, he took the wrong method—it would have succeeded at Paris, but was incompatible with the wild spirit of Freiberg, who felt contempt, in addition to his previous ill-will, for a man who endeavoured to sooth him into amity. He knew of no such system in his own heart, which would have delighted in the disgrace of a stranger of high pretensions—and he could not account for the ill-timed courtesy of the baron, except as an effort of rank cowardice, to deprecate his resentment. Such conduct was contrary to his experience. When a student gained a fellow student's mistress, it had been ever held as a source of triumph : when Ritter cheated Ritter, the feeling was the same—but for the vanquished to fawn upon his conqueror would have been contrary to nature, and despicable below contempt.

The attempt at friendship, or rather sociability, only recoiled upon the baron's head : he perceived, that for the future he had created a dangerous enemy—and it behooved him to beware of the danger. This state of half-civilized life he now discovered was not at all to his mind. He had no distaste for warfare—but he would rather have had such men as Freiberg and his troopers for enemies than comrades. However, the die was cast : he had chosen to return with Turenne, instead of continuing his route to the prince's camp, and he resolved to abide by his decision. The viscount, he perceived, was in good favour with the Germans—but then he had no rivalry to contend with—the connexion was of longer standing, and had been cemented by several engagements with the troops of the Protector of the League. And the regiment were besides extremely well pleased with the manœuvre of their commander, as they were in advance of their countrymen, which gave them a choice of plunder.

With these prospects before him, together with his love-fit of melancholy, the baron did not feel at home in his new

career ; however, he was consoled with the idea that it would not last long—that in Guienne or Gascony, wherever the Huguenot forces assembled, he should find his own retainers and friends.

As Turenne's object was to march as stealthily as possible, avoiding contact with the Catholic forces and large towns, they generally bivouacked on a heath, or in whatever convenient spot daylight forsook them.

On the morning of the second day's march, the two scouts returned from their advanced post to report that an enemy was within sight ; that they had reached the brow of a hill, and were about to descend to the open plain beneath, when their progress was arrested on beholding a strong corps of lancers coming from the north by a cross road which intersected in advance that which the Ritters were travelling by. Schwartz and his companion waited to see which path the cavalcade would take ; whether they continued southward, or struck into the line of march of their unseen foes. They however took the former route, which was a well-frequented road leading to the southern provinces, and the great cities of Lyons and Avignon.

"Then we cannot touch them," cried Turenne ; "the Duke of Guise must have learned ere this my design ; and I have little doubt his troopers are tracking our march—and you Ritters are like snails, one can always trace your steps. Not the distance of a pistol-shot out of our road, Herren ! Mark that well in your memory !"

"There is a large village towards the south," said Ezzelin, who had made up his mind to fight, "and we want forage—and some of our comrades also want a few trifles which those lancers have in plenty !"

"You stubborn-headed scout," cried Turenne, who did not at all relish the enthusiasm with which Ezzelin's oratory had been listened to : "do you not see that those lancers are a corps of the enemy who have been sent to intercept us—and that they have overshot their mark ? Let us cross the heath before the main body arrives in sight. Forward !"

"Colonel !" exclaimed Ezzelin, almost in despair : "in the midst I saw a most abominably large monk, as lofty a giant as Albert of Bavaria ; he would be worth pouncing upon !"

"By the Virgins of Köln !" shouted Schwartz ; "and I saw a lady riding by his side with a black mask on—or else she were an African queen."

"May be it is the Duchess of Montpensier, travelling to the

south to make a diversion there in favour of her brother," said De Nevailles, at a venture.

"I know madame extremely well," rejoined the viscount, "such an expedition is quite to her taste. How many lances were there, Ezzelin?"

"A hundred, as near as I could guess," replied the Ritter.

Turenne paused a few moments in consideration. A lady and a monk travelling with a large escort, was quite a different affair from meeting with the protector's troopers hot in pursuit. It might be, as the baron had hinted, the fiery Montpensier, like a Bellona, about to kindle the hearts of the Lyonnais with her warlike fervour. She would prove a rich prize, as the lady, no doubt, carried a good store of gold; besides, she owed Turenne two thousand crowns, won at play, which had not been paid to him when he left Paris in a hurry for Germany. In giving credit, however, to De Nevailles' random assertion, that the lady in the black mask was Montpensier, he had an idea that the baron, who was close and reserved in political matters, knew more than he really did.

To the joy of the first troop, the colonel changed his mind respecting the policy of an attack, and made the necessary arrangements for seizing the person of the fair traveller. As he had good reason to believe that the forces of the League were at no great distance in his rear, he would not allow the whole regiment to be employed in this paltry affair, lest they should be surprised at a disadvantage by the Catholics; but threw the whole responsibility on the first troop, which had so warmly solicited the honour or glory, which ever term it deserved. His track lay direct across the heath, through the wooded country in the west, and thither he determined to march the main body of the regiment, and await the result of De Nevailles' attack on the lancers. He was, besides, too well aware of the temper of the Ritters to doubt, that if the whole regiment were ordered to charge, they would not be content without carrying the village, as well as capturing the lady; and once engaged in inspecting the property of others, they never knew when to leave off.

To prevent surprise in the rear, he left behind a few Ritters on the hill, with orders to keep a sharp look-out, while the regiment descended to the heath. This movement was accomplished happily enough, and they reached the plain ere they were perceived by the lancers; De Nevailles restraining the ardour of his men, till the main body of the regiment had disappeared on the other side, out of sight and out of temptation.

The march of the Ritters had, however, been perceived, or probably, heard by the lancers, who were now half a league in advance, and close upon the village. They halted on the approach of the baron, who moved at a very steady pace, that his troop might not be out of breath at the moment when it would be most needed. The chief object being the capture of the lady, De Nevailles offered a considerable reward to the trooper who should be fortunate enough to obtain the prize. During the ride, Freiberg's whole thoughts were intent on what he had heard of her presumed quality.

"The Duchess of Montpensier," he said to himself more than once;—"what would my fellow-students say, if I were to carry a duchess with me into Germany, and one also allied to royalty? It shall be so—the exploit is worthy of a Freiberg."

"What are you muttering to yourself about a girdle?" cried Schwartz, who overheard Ezzelin indulging himself in a soliloquy.

"If I catch that thundering papal monk, my fortune is made," replied the veteran;—"he should clean the mare during the campaign; and afterward I would show him as a curiosity in every fair throughout Bavaria."

"Let us go halves—one alone could never manage him," rejoined Schwartz;—"sword or lance you might keep out of his way—but he would brain you with a stool or stew-pan!"

"I am afraid we shall not catch the shaven-crown," cried Ezzelin:—"look, neither he nor the black-faced damsel is in sight. Nothing but a line of bright spear-heads, glistening as fierce as boars' tusks."

"There they go," said Schwartz, whispering to his comrade, "the monk and the lady, as fast as their horses can carry them, into the village. I see them both between that stout fellow's elbow, for all the world like a peep through drunken Schweppe's fairy-show at Baden fair! Ezzelin! *Meinherr!* if we break through the lances, let us push on at once to the village. Our noble captain will not want us—we are half as many again as these fellows."

To this proposition Ezzelin made no refusal—it was too congenial to his taste. While the two scouts were thus agreeing in the mode of bettering their fortunes, the lieutenant was indulging in similar prospects. He had also witnessed the flight of the lady, and had come, also, to the determination of striking a blow or two, just to make clear the way, and then—hurrah! for the Duchess of Montpensier.

A lady travelling with a confessor and a hundred lances, raised no slight curiosity in the baron to know her rank ; and though he had not put such faith in his own surmise as the viscount did, yet he was pleased that the conduct of the attempted capture had been intrusted to him.

The enemy were drawn up in array, evidently with a view to cover the retreat of their laical and monastic convoy. The Ritters, destitute of lances, had nothing to oppose to the long arms of the enemy, save pistols ; but the populous village in the rear was a loadstone of sufficient power to have carried them through much greater obstacles. They held fire till within pistol-range, and then let fly a shower of balls, which made many an opening in the *chevaux-de-frise* of steel. An immediate charge with the sword, before the lancers could recover from the attack, confirmed the advantage ; and their numbers being superior, they succeeded in disordering and putting to flight the whole corps. The enemy fled towards the village, pursued by the Ritters ; though it was perceived by the conquerors, that several of their more daring comrades were in advance of the lancers, and seemingly pursued by them.

The baron's first object on entering the village was to ascertain whether the monk and his fair charge had taken shelter there, or continued their route ; and he was not satisfied on this point till he had reconnoitred beyond its precincts, and received from the peasants a denial of their having seen any thing of the travellers. Finding that a proffered reward could gain him no intelligence, he concluded the objects he was in search of were still concealed in the village, whither he returned.

CHAPTER XVII.

Uprose the sun, and uprose Emilie.

CHAUCER.

THE Ritter fights as long as there is any one to oppose him ; but as soon as the affair is over, he casts an anxious eye around for his reward. When the village was garried, the greater proportion dismounted, and commenced an active inquisition after the lady ; but they were not scrupulous in taking any

thing which displayed itself conveniently in the search. The remainder kept guard, lest the scattered lancers should re-assemble and prove troublesome; and as this corps could not join in the plunder, it employed itself in exterminating such of the unfortunate fragments of the escort as showed themselves within range.

The villagers, already alarmed at the approach of the lancers, were in the greatest consternation when the Ritters were perceived in their rear. It was, indeed, too bad that a fresh swarm should arrive before the first were gone; the poor inhabitants knew by experience that all who wore helmets and carried arms were guests at free cost, and were, besides, no-wise economical in their riot. But every evil has its favourable aspect, and the neighbours congratulated each other that the locusts were preparing to fight among themselves. The old proverb, that when thieves fall out honest men come by their own, was about to be realized; for in return for the many expensive travellers entertained during their military career in this little hamlet of Nivernois, there would at any rate remain the bodies of the slain, which, as all husbandmen are aware, make excellent manure;—a repayment, almost in kind, for the hitherto unpaid for entertainment of man and beast. Joyfully the honest fellows looked on the contention, waiting their opportunity to arrest a flying steed, or any other scintillation of the fight.

Hans Schwartz and his comrade Ezzelin did not stop till they had reached the market-place in the centre of the village. It was a good central spot for observation; and turning on their saddles, they looked around with experienced eyes, to determine at which house their labours should begin. The inn stared them in the face; it was opposite the market-place, at the end of a recess where stood the cattle on market-days.

"*Das Wirthshaus!*" cried Ezzelin; "we shall find the old fellow with his cord unloosened, guzzling away his fears like the famous Bishop of Metz."

"Do as you like," replied his lathy companion; "we should more likely find him under the bed or in the cellar. But hark ye! if this lady should be in company, we go halves in her ransom at the captain's price."

"Agreed!" exclaimed the other.

"Look at that fool Fritz and his comrades, losing their time in that dirty hovel—neither lady nor priest would take to such a place!" cried Schwartz.

Whatever compensation the villagers might have intended

appropriating to themselves out of the spoils of the battle, they certainly were doomed to pay the full value for it, as the Ritters were breaking into every house with the most expeditious despatch. But our two scouts were men of science; they first asked themselves the question, which was the most likely house for monk or dame to take refuge in.

In this uncertainty, Schwartz espied an urchin watching the inquisitorial proceedings with great curiosity. Feeling in his pouch for gold, he took out several bright pieces, and dismounting, ran up to, and caught hold of the boy ere he could escape. Ezzelin, who was not aware of the manœuvre, watched the actions of the trooper with great surprise. The boy struggled to get away, but this was impossible; the manner of Schwartz appeared soothing, but the urchin shook his head; this irritated the German; with his right hand he lifted the boy from his feet, holding him by the doublet, as one carries a puppy by the neck; in his other hand he displayed the tempting, glittering show; the eyes of the little cub looked as though they would have eaten up the gold. Ezzelin burst out into loud laughter as the boy, after a parley, ran off with the money.

His comrade returned with a knowing eye, and reported, that just before the Ritters came up to the market-place, the boy had seen a monk rush out of the inn-door, and enter the hostelry yard close by.

The two Ritters rode up to the inn, dismounted, and led their horses into the yard, when they began to look about for the monk. A stable door, half open, soon attracted their attention. They entered without noise, stepping carefully on the straw, which saved the clatter their heavy boots would otherwise have created on the stones. The object of their search was found engaged in saddling a horse. Ezzelin made a sign to his companion to be silent—the monk was talking to himself.

"It is only transferring the saddles from two tired animals to this fresh-looking creature and his mate, and by St. Francis! we can escape by the back-door and speed through the wood like lightning."

"A robbery!" whispered Ezzelin, "what a heavy purse this fellow's conscience must have allowed him to gather. We say nothing about that to the captain."

"Hist!" rejoined Schwartz, in the same close whispering style, "if we wait a minute we shall have the lady." He then crept into the adjoining stall, crouching low, so as not to

be seen : Ezzelin took his place beside his companion. The monk was now fastening the saddle-girth.

"Pugh ! It's an awkward business, this !" he exclaimed. "I hope the saddle will not slip. There—that rosary is told."

"Impious profane wretch !" muttered Schwartz, looking at his companion.

"Now for my lady's palfrey," cried the monastic ostler, leaving the stall in which he had been so usefully engaged :—"I pray Heaven that our brave lancers may keep those devils at bay a little longer."

It was a critical moment with the Ritters ; they did not know whether to jump up and lay hold of his reverence, or allow him to pass the front of the stall without an attack ; but as his majestic figure brushed by in the uncertain light of the stable, it impressed them with almost a feeling of dread, increased by their stooping posture, which placed them entirely at his mercy, and made his lofty stature seem still loftier to their lowly eyes. He entered the stall on the other side of his concealed enemies.

"This mare will just suit my lady and Lisette," said the monk, and after another glance, he went back and brought the pillion.

"Stolen goods always suit," whispered Ezzelin.

"Hist !" said the other, rising up slowly, high enough to peep into the adjoining stall ; but he quickly dropped into his former position.

"How now ?" said Ezzelin.

"His head is close to the horse's head," replied Schwartz.

"Oh ! holy Luther save me," cried the old trooper suddenly, in a voice expressive of great pain ;—"I cannot abide this damnable doubling any longer." So up sprung the old man, to the great relief of his loins and back ; while Schwartz, finding their presence thus betrayed, rushed out of the stall, crying—

"When that mare has finished her confession, father, allow us to have speech with you."

The astonishment of the monk may easily be conceived at this startling interruption to his labours. He turned round and confronted the intruders. Were it in the power of man to silence the demands, selfish or just, of his fellow-creatures, by the mere majesty of his presence, the Ritters would have stood powerless before the magnificent form of the monk, who now looked down upon them. He wore the garb of the order of St. Francis, with the cord around his waist, from which fashion

came the familiar designation of Cordelier, applied to the brethren of that foundation; and though the rough gray robe concealed the proportions of the colossal figure beneath its ample folds, yet the head, the capital of this noble column of humanity, would have held in willing captivity the eye of a Raffaele or Correggio. His age was about half a century—too youthful for a perfect resemblance—or we might have compared his noble features with those of the venerable St. Jerome, to whom he bore a striking likeness. But the Cordelier had, as yet, no pretensions admissible to the attribute of veneration—his step was firm—his body erect as youth itself—and his strength unimpaired, and equal to any labour within the scope of man; and though his features were indicative of enthusiasm, yet the slightly flushed cheek and brow, and the jocund lip, betrayed a sympathy with the fare of rich men's tables, rather than the abstemiousness of a pale prophet or enthusiast. He was, indeed, a confessor to whom the Duke of Bouillon would have felt not the slightest fear of heavy penance, in confessing his manifold sins of good living;—one might have imagined the following dialogue to have occurred between them.

Bouillon. Father, I have eaten many a fattened capon beyond the sufficiency of nature.

Cordelier. (With a deep sigh from the tomb of the capons). Son, and so have I!

And who would not have a confessor of this character! One, from whom we were certain of receiving sympathy as well as consolation; one—unlike the ascetic, who knows only of going astray into a forbidden land of milk and honey by hearsay—but one who can judge of the degree of guiltiness, through that the best of all judges, experience; one who would intercede for us the more earnestly, inasmuch as he had a homelier conviction of the temptation to frailty; one who was alive to the infirmities of humanity—and who, far different from the preacher who looks down from a spiritual height upon his sinful flock, would, when he prayed for deliverance from evil, pray earnestly for himself.

But the rosy face of the Cordelier—we must however reiterate, in justice to his reverence, that the epithet of illustration was not borrowed from the deep damask rose—underwent a change when he beheld the pair of uncouth troopers, who now blocked up the entrance of the stall as though it were a besieged town. Yet his fears were not for himself—he thought of the danger accruing to the lady and her servant, both unprotected from the licentiousness of the rude heretical Ger-

mans. On arriving at the village, he entertained little doubt of the success of the escort ; but when news was brought by the inhabitants that the lancers were giving ground, he repented of his confidence, and bitterly regretted that he had not passed through without a moment's delay. Taking counsel with the host, he found there was yet a chance of escape through the woods behind the village ; but their horses were jaded, and if the enemy got a scent of their track, they might soon be overtaken. Upon inquiring whether any horses could be procured, either by money or otherwise, the host, who was much taken with his guests, replied that there were two in the stable which belonged to a rich old miller then in the inn, who might be asked the question. This was enough. The Cordelier had witnessed many exchanges of ecclesiastical property, in some of which the wishes of the laical party had not been consulted, but in all the demands of the church taken care of ; thus he formed his precedents ; so, stealing out of the inn and into the yard, in doing which he was accidentally seen by the urchin who sold him to the Ritters—he began to play his new part of ostler, with what success we have already narrated.

His first impulse was to rush upon the troopers, crush them by a bold effort, and hasten to the assistance of his fair charge and her maid. But the cautionary distance which they kept, as though he were a baited tiger, and the menacing attitude of Ezzelin, who had drawn his sword, rendered this a much too dangerous task. It was necessary, therefore, to resort to the churchman's weapon.

"What faith have you in my holy calling, sons, that you thus obstruct my path ?" cried the Cordelier, in a calm voice.

"My faith," replied Ezzelin, keeping a watchful eye on the tall monk, as though he expected him to make a spring, "is, that you are one of the devouring locusts of Rome :—we have cleared our own father-land of the vermin like yourself, and have come here under a wise prince to do the same good turn to our brethren in France."

"Bravo, Ezzelin !" cried Schwartz ; "spoken as solemnly as a preacher. Now hear me, old shaven-crown. We have caught you horse-stealing, and by the sweet Virgins of Kölin, you have carried that rope about your paunch for a good purpose of justice,—we shall hang you up to the rafters with it."

"Have the mercy of Christians, as you value your death-bed !" exclaimed the Cordelier, in great tribulation.

"Death-bed ! Old Popeling !" cried Schwartz, menacing his victim, though still afraid to advance into the stall where the

Cordelier had enshrouded himself, close enough to whisper into the ear of the lady's intended palfrey.—“ Hurrah ! when we crossed the Rhine, we swore to rid the land of popery, or make the corn-fields of France our death-bed. Hurrah ! you bundle of corded sackcloth, where is the lady in the mask ? She's worth golden crowns to us ! ”

The monk started, for it was now evident his fair charge had attracted the notice of the enemy : the perspiration covered his forehead, and he almost trembled.

Schwartz whispered to his comrade, who only replied in the same key :—“ Yes ! but we must take him alive, or he is of no use to us ! ”

The Cordelier, who overheard them whispering, and saw also, that in spite of their threats, they were afraid to venture into his den, watched their actions closely ; he heard Schwartz creeping into the adjoining stall, and guessing the motive, was prepared for it, without however showing any alarm to Ezzelin, who kept guard with his trusty blade. He presently heard the other trooper gently clambering up by the manger ; the next moment the body of the Ritter upreared, and reaching over him, threw a noose around his neck ; but the monk, who did not wait to be strangled, caught hold of the man, and drew his head downward ; then, grasping the protruding hilt of his antagonist's sheathed sword, he struck him with the left hand a heavy blow in the neck, between the cuirass and morion, and the next instant, rushing forward with his sharp prize, he beat down the guard of the old trooper, and ran across the yard, the rope still dangling from his neck.

When the Baron de Nevaillès returned to the village, he found his men all actively employed in foraging, with their usual characteristic eagerness. As this was not his *forte*, he contented himself with riding about to prevent any wanton act on the part of the Ritters ; for he had not yet been sufficiently inured to the practices of warfare to contemplate with tranquillity the excesses ever attendant on the march of a foreign soldiery. As he was passing the inn, expecting every moment that his men would bring the welcome intelligence of the capture of the lady, he fancied he heard a scream from the interior. However willing to advance the just fortunes of his royal master, even to the acting in concert with the present ruffians whom he commanded, yet he could not help feeling a horror, that under his sanction they should commit outrages in his native country. He was a Frenchman ; and the scream which smote his ear smote also his conscience. He dismounted

hastily and entered the inn. The host and his family had run away or concealed themselves, leaving the lower part of the house to the entire control of three Ritters, with whom love of wine predominated over the love of money or glory. They were seated round a cask, the top staved in, and helping themselves to the contents as liberally as though it were mess-soup. He would have passed the group in silence, but the men, on seeing their captain, invited him, in uproarious style, to share in the liquid spoil; he would have refused, but remembering the caution of Turenne to be on good terms with the troop, contented himself with emptying a single cup to the honour and everlasting success of the first troop of the noble Viscount de Turenne's regiment of free Ritters. The jovial soldier-like manner in which he drained the cup, and the freedom and heartiness of the toast, gained him at once the respect of the troopers; and under cover of his good fame, he was about to retreat stealthily from the room, when another cry, coming from a distant quarter of the house, hastened his steps.

The upper rooms were connected with the ground-floor by an old staircase; this he speedily ascended, and rushing along the corridor, entered a chamber of which the door was partly open.

The first object which met his view was a female lying on the floor, dead or in a swoon; near her, the dead body of a young man lying with his face upward, seemingly, by his dress, a servant of the inn: his right hand still grasped the sword which had not availed its owner. But what engaged the whole attention of De Nevaillès was one in the Ritter dress bending over a lady who knelt in supplication; the station of the trooper hindered him from seeing her face; but he had little doubt that his comrade had found the lady they were in quest of.

The entrance of the baron had not been heard either by the trooper or his captive, and he paused to see what the German would do.

"No! not for the wealth of all France!" exclaimed the Ritter, in a voice which De Nevaillès would have recognised as Freiberg's, had not his ungainly form produced a previous conviction of the lieutenant's identity;—"by the light of those eyes I swear, you shall travel with me back to Germany. Nay, no struggling! By Luther! this very hour!—in four days we'll cross the Rhine—this very hour you shall start, my pretty Catholic! My father shall see you—my fellow-students will envy me! But you are very young for a duchess!"

"Ah!" said De Nevaillès to himself:—"this will not do at

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all. But it cannot be Montpensier—she would have dashed his head against the wall rather than have knelt to a German abortion !”

The lady continued to resist the efforts of the lieutenant to raise her up ; but he declared with an oath, that her endeavours were of no avail ; that his horse was ready, and away she should go.

“What ! without asking for your reward ?” cried De Ne-vailles, aloud.

At the sound of his voice, the lady uttered a loud cry ; and when the Ritter turned round to face the baron, she fell from his grasp in a swoon.

“So you are going to desert, lieutenant,” continued the baron, walking towards the prostrate form of the lady. “Well ! every one to his taste. Let us see what your’s may be—a great temptation, I am sure !”

But his progress and speech were both at once interrupted by the lieutenant, who threw himself between the lady and his captain, greeting him with a serpent-like glance of malice, while he said, with an assumed careless tone,—

“The first man, captain, has ever the best mess. There is a girl yonder, very passable, if this were out of sight. You have taken away my troop—let that content you. But you would now deprive me of this little idolatress. Well ! it may be French morality, but now listen to Wittenberg logic ! If you touch her,”—and his repulsive features the while curved into a satirical smile,—“Viscount de Turenne’s regiment will lose the future services of the captain of its first troop.”

Nothing roused the baron so much as a threat ; the only reply he made to the Ritter was a violent push, which sent him reeling ; he then bent on one knee to pick up the still insensible girl ; but when he beheld her face he became almost as powerless as herself. It was like a dream—he could not believe the truth of the vision—yet he felt certain that he was looking on the pale features of Emilie ; that he held her in his arms.

From this state of mingled pleasure and pain he was aroused by the lieutenant, who, in a voice calm in its rage, demanded the lady. The baron sprung to his feet ; the idea that Emilie had been in the grasp of the wretch before him stung his soul to madness. He drew his rapier.

“As I desired !” exclaimed the imp, with a malicious smile, who was at the moment unarmed, having after the encounter with the young man who had rushed to the rescue of Emilie, struck the point of his reeking weapon upright in the floor.

He retreated, with his eye fixed on his adversary; his sword-arm searching for the weapon. At length his hand grasped the hilt—a savage glare of light flashed from his eyes—he bent forward his head like a serpent about to strike its prey—and rushed upon the baron. They joined in close fight. De Nevaillies was not in the first shock so much excited as his adversary; but a glance which he caught of the still prostrate Emilie, awoke all his fire and passion; his blood boiled in his veins—the impish object opposing him he felt too impotent for his rage; he wished him endued with fifty times his strength, that it might be crushed only by an effort worthy of the avenging expiation of the wrong he had meditated to the idol of his sweet hopes—his Emilie!

With a spirit equal to his own in intensity, though springing from a worse cause, the lieutenant kept his ground, returning blow for blow; each seeking for an avenue to the other's heart;—but the baron's superior height had a manifest advantage; and his cause—purer, holier—lent him a firmer strength, and a hope anticipating victory. But this consummation was not easy. Freiberg grew in spirit like the fiend he looked to be; and collecting his strength, drove in upon De Nevaillies, forcing him to retire. Making a virtue of necessity, the baron retreated with a wary step, watching an opportunity for an unguarded opening; but this policy had a fatal effect. He was fighting with his back to the door, and near the body of the young man whose gore made the floor slippery. Seeing the wished-for opportunity, he made a plunge; but, oh! the agony of that moment!—his foot slid, and he fell with his face on the floor. He heard the demoniac shout of Freiberg; he expected, with thrilling nerves, the steel through his neck; he shuddered, and turned his face round, and beheld—not the point of his adversary's sword at his throat—but his deformed body reeling backward—his face streaming with blood; while above the fallen baron stood a colossal monk, brandishing the weapon with which he had performed so timely a rescue.

Seeing that the Ritter did not move, and appeared fairly *hors de combat*, the Cordelier threw down his sword, and lifted up De Nevaillies as though he were a child; while the baron was so lost in admiration of the noble presence of the monk, that he was unable to express his thanks for the succour. His deliverer had no sooner effected one charitable office than he flew to perform another; and, by the united exertions of De Nevaillies and himself, mademoiselle was soon brought to a state of consciousness.

It would be impossible to portray the look of joy with which Emilie greeted her lover when she awoke to life, and found herself supported in his arms. The reserve which had characterized her conduct at the Louvre gave way to the unrestrained expression of her tenderness : she seemed overpowered—her head sunk on his breast. This mode of expressing her gratitude was not at all intelligible to the Cordelier ; he looked amazed ; and an audible exclamation of surprise escaped him, which the baron hearing, said—

“ Father ! that girl is not dead—unless your entrance frightened away returning consciousness.”

The appeal could not be withstood, though the monk went to the assistance of Emilie’s servant with much less willingness than he had struck a blow for the young man, who now, under circumstances which excited a disagreeable feeling, in a manner commanded his services. As he stooped to lift up the girl his foot struck against the dead man, and he exclaimed with an inward satisfaction, which lent its influence to his voice—

“ What, more blood ! That German then fully deserved his fate.”

“ According to the Mosaic law, Father,” cried De Nevaillès.

“ It is Lisette,” said Emilie ; “ let me help the poor girl !”

But the baron knew not how to part with his recovered treasure ; he still detained her, saying in a whisper, which the monk could not hear, “ If that giant fails, your aid will not avail.” Had she not recovered for a full hour, we are afraid that compassion would have been still a stranger to the breast of the baron, whose whole existence was wrapped up in Emilie, and their sudden and unexpected meeting.

But Lisette proved her immortality for the nonce, and was soon at the side of her mistress, though still ill from the horrible fright she had suffered ; while the Cordelier, looking upon his charge and her new-found friend, exclaimed—

“ Well ! I ought to be a statuary—the grouping is worthy of the Vatican. You look like a pair of lovers who have died through excess of joy in each other’s arms—so motionless.”

“ Forgive me, father !” said Emilie, lifting up her face with its falling tears, like a modest floweret after the sunny April shower. She then arose and presented the baron to the Cordelier as Monsieur Villa Franca ; but correcting herself, she added, the Baron de Nevaillès. The monk looked still more surprised. Nor was the baron pleased at the disclosure of his rank.

"Villa Franca! De Nevailles!" the Cordelier exclaimed:—"I have heard of both."

"And not much good of either, I dare say," cried the baron; "but mademoiselle does not know the debt of gratitude I owe you. When you stood over me as I lay on the floor, I thought a giant had come to my relief—but whence that rope about your neck? one might actually take you, when in repose, for some lofty statue lowered from its pedestal."

"And the rope breaking, the concussion infused life into the stone, and so I ran away;—will that suit your fancy, mon-seigneur?" cried the Cordelier.

But Emilie, who knew the eccentricity of the baron, and that he was more likely to mystify the confessor than explain the circumstances of their acquaintance, and the feelings consequent on their meeting again, which had so much surprised the holy man, interfered to prevent any misunderstanding. She signified her desire of speaking alone to the Cordelier; and the baron, though very loath, took that opportunity of descending to look after his troop, which was dispersed throughout the village.

He ordered the trumpeter to re-assemble his men, who, however, after their usual fashion, came in but slowly; and those who did muster were encumbered with forage for the horses, and provisions which they had snatched away from the owners for their own mouths. No one had found either lady or monk, and this disappointment was severely felt by the troop, it was so contrary to their usual good fortune.

But while the muster was increasing gradually, a Ritter was seen riding into the village at a furious rate: he brought unwelcome news to the captain; a large body of cavalry had been observed by the scouts on the hill: Turenne had beat up his quarters, and commenced a quick retreat in the direction of his route, giving orders by the Ritter to the baron, that he must not attempt to return, but engage a guide, who would conduct them across the country by any road intersecting the route to La Charité.

This intelligence was immediately made known to the Ritter, who assembled their comrades in good earnest, and the muster was soon complete, with the exception of Freiberg. A trooper, whom De Nevailles sent out to ascertain whether the enemy took the cross road or wheeled into the path leading to the village, soon returned with the alarming news that the cavalry were now hastening across the heath. There was no time to be lost; but despite the danger, the baron resolved not

to leave without another interview with Emilie. Quick as his fears he dismounted, and was soon in the presence of his sweet mistress; the Cordelier advanced to meet him with open arms.

"It is the first time, son, I have embraced a heretic," said the monk :—"but why this alarm?"

In a few hurried words he related the nature of his position, and the advance of the forces of the protector; but his thoughts still rested on the danger Emilie would be again exposed to.

"Nay! for that matter there is no fear," said the Cordelier; "with an army obeying the Duke of Guise, I and my friends are safe."

This assurance somewhat comforted the baron—but there was another perplexity which gave him pain: he knew not whither mademoiselle was travelling, nor why the monk should bear her company. Emilie was about to speak, but the Cordelier interrupted her, by saying that he was conducting her to a convent at Avignon, where the queen had destined her to take the veil. De Neailles was petrified.

"Let Guise and his squadrons arrive—I stir not!" he exclaimed in despondency.

Even the whispered consolation of Emilie could not revive the courage of his soul. He could not account for her cruelty, her apparent insensibility to her own fate, and her readiness to obey the dictates of the queen-mother.

"Is there no hope?" he exclaimed, kneeling at her feet. "Do not go to Avignon! Let me, while there is yet time, escort you anywhere but there—to the King of Navarre—to—"

"That cannot be, son!" said the Cordelier, interposing:—"I have sworn to conduct Mademoiselle Emilie in safety to her destination."

"Well!" replied De Neailles, with a haughty glance at the monk. Then taking the hand of the sweet girl, whose eyes were dimmed with tears, he asked her if she went willingly.

She replied in the affirmative.

"Then hear of me from the battle-field!" he exclaimed, in a subdued but earnest tone, and rushed from the chamber—but the voice of Emilie called him back.

"Is monseigneur no longer that Villa Franca," said she, smiling, "who lived in a sea of trouble as his natural element? Where has flown his confidence? Cherish hope even in despair—I have but adopted your own policy of flying in the face of danger to avoid it."

A cry arose from the streets.

"Alas ! it is too late to listen to these words of hope. The leaguers are coming !" exclaimed the baron. "The lives of my troop are in my custody. Farewell !"

He rushed from the chamber, mounted in an instant his steed, and put himself at the head of the troop.

"Here is a boy, captain," said Ezzelin, looking over his shoulder at the urchin, who was mounted behind the Ritter, and held him tight by the cuirass, "who knows the path through the wood !"

"Yes, and the difference between gold and silver," added Schwartz.

Under the guidance of this boy, the same who had sold the monk and had now bartered his own services, the troop escaped into the woods by paths frequented only by woodmen and the peasants of the vicinity.